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# *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an aesthetic pre-occupation in the novels of Virginia Woolf

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to show that Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* were a pre-occupation in Woolf's work throughout her career. The introduction explores *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory, tracing its development in theories concerning the combination of art forms. I go on to show how Woolf uses *The Voyage Out* to explore what the Modern novel can learn from musical arts, while *Jacob's Room* adds painting to music as a significant field of interest for Woolf. *Mrs Dalloway* adds to the complexity of combination, for I will demonstrate that in this novel a Nietzschean interpretation of Wagner's ideas found in *The Birth of Tragedy* is detectable, allowing Woolf to compare the motivation of more extreme *avant-garde* groups. The chapter on *To the Lighthouse* will consider Woolf's evaluation of her parents' cultural background and the influence of Roger Fry on her developing aesthetic theory of combination. I shall argue that understanding of these areas allows Woolf to begin to experiment with her own form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is in *The Waves* that the connection with Wagner is most obvious. Here, I believe Woolf shifts the focus of attention from Wagnerian theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the Modernists' development of such ideas, demonstrating her knowledge of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*. Looking closely at the 1915 Raid Scene in *The Years*, I intend to show that Woolf's thinking on the concept of combination is equally radical in this novel which is often considered to be more conventional. I will go on to suggest that *Between the Acts*, widely acknowledged to indicate a crisis in Woolf's confidence in Modernism, marks a turning point in her thinking about the possibilities of combining the arts to achieve *Gesamtkunstwerk*. I will argue that in this piece Woolf provides us with all the elements used to create unity in the previous works and yet they are never wholly united. Woolf, however, is not suggesting that *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an impossibility, she is rather indicating that the audience lacks the ability to provide the stage for such a piece to exist.

# Contents

# Abbreviations

***VO*** – Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, London: Grafton, 1978; first pub. Gerald Duckworth, 1915.

***JR*** – Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, London: Grafton, 1976 ; first pub. Hogarth Press, 1922.

***MD*** – Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, London: Grafton, 1976; first pub. Hogarth, 1925.

***TL*** – Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, London, Penguin, 1969; first pub. Hogarth Press, 1927.

***TW*** – Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, London: Grafton, 1988; first pub. Hogarth Press, 1925.

***TY*** – Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

***BA*** – Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, London: Grafton, 1978; first pub. Hogarth, 1941.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1909, Virginia Woolf visited the Wagner festival in Bayreuth. It was just one visit of many to theatres, concert halls, opera houses and art galleries which helped to form Woolf's cultural understanding before she became a novelist. However, it was a very important visit, for Wagner's work formed a distinct and influential part of nineteenth-century thinking on the arts. Although Woolf was no stranger to Wagner's operas before 1909, the concentration on Wagner and the opera in this year (the visit to Bayreuth was prefaced by Woolf's review of the Covent Garden opera season) did inspire her to write two essays which form an important part of any evaluation of her work based on aesthetics. In the first of these essays, 'The Opera', written before Bayreuth, Woolf looks at the impact of opera in general, noting:

> The words 'The Opera' alone call up a complex vision. We see the immense house, with its great curved sides, its soft depths of rose colour and cream, the laces hanging down in loops from the boxes ... We think of this: of the hum and animation when the pyramid of light blazes out and all the colours move; and of the strange hush and dimness when the vistas of the stage are revealed and the voices mingle with the violins.[1]

The references to 'voices', 'violins' and 'the stage', we might expect to find in any description of opera, and yet the fact that Woolf writes that when the lights go up 'all the colours move' suggests the opera's debt to the visual arts. This essay is interesting because it hints at Woolf's awareness of the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a concept based specifically on theories of combinations of different art forms. Comments in the essay show

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[1] Virginia Woolf, 'The Opera' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), Volume 1, pp. 270 –1.

Woolf considering the possibility of combining arts as she asks of Wagner's operas:

> It is [sic] that there is some cleavage between the drama and the music? Music (it may be) raises associations in the mind which are incongruous with the associations raised by any other art; the effort to resolve them into one clear conception is painful, and the mind is constantly woken and disillusioned (p. 270).

Here, Woolf is considering whether it is in fact possible to combine music and drama by looking specifically at the powers of music. Her estimation at this time seems to be that although on occasion Wagner does combine music and action successfully, at times the music prevents the piece from having full impact. She asserts, 'The music … excites the strongest sympathy in us. And yet, swept away as we are at some moments, there are others when we seem to be dropped again' (p. 270). And part of the essay is in fact an exploration of the differences between Wagner and Gluck, which could seem to suggest Gluck's superiority. In the latter's work, Woolf notes that, 'the mysterious shapes, dances and exquisite melody which here come miraculously together produce a perfect whole of which the parts seem to embody a beauty which we could realise by no other means' (p. 270), which seems to suggest that Gluck achieves the effect that Wagner sought. However, whether Wagner or Gluck is the most successful matters little here. Woolf's comments on Gluck's and Wagner's work are important, not because they add to our understanding of either composer (for they are, in fact, tentative thoughts on the masters' works); they matter because of what they reveal about Woolf's own aesthetic thinking.

'Impressions at Bayreuth', written in the same year, also seems to convey the sense that Wagner's operas are about separation rather than unity. Woolf states of *Parsifal*, the work which, at the time, she considered to be the best of Wagner's operas, that 'The unfamiliarity of the ideas hinders one at the

outset from bringing the different parts together', and she notes that the audience is 'bewildered by a music that continues with the utmost calm and intensity independently of [the characters]'.[2] Yet Woolf is also certain that:

> Somehow, Wagner has conveyed the desire of the Knight's for the Grail in such a way that the intense emotion of human beings is combined with the unearthly nature of the things they seek. ... Again, feelings of this kind that are equally diffused and felt for one object in common create an impression of largeness and ... of an overwhelming unity (p. 289).

Woolf also suggests that 'it is surely the completeness of the work that remains with us' (p. 290). 'The Opera' and 'Impressions at Bayreuth', by suggesting that Woolf was aware of the idea that arts could combine to produce a totality, form a very important part of our understanding of Woolf's aesthetic theory and it is here that we find the beginnings of ideas which were to permeate Woolf's own fiction. Both essays suggest that for Woolf an evaluation of Wagner's work was important.

These essays, together with comments in letters on the trip to Bayreuth, mean that it is easy to demonstrate that Woolf had knowledge of Wagner's operas and that Wagner and Wagnerism played a part in Woolf's early thinking about art. We know that Woolf and her companions spent at lot of time discussing Wagner's operas when at Bayreuth. We learn that on August 8th 1909, Woolf wrote to Vanessa Bell, 'We have been discussing obscure points in Parsifal',[3] and we are aware that her initial reaction to *Parsifal* had been to declare it 'a very emotional work, unlike any of the others' (p. 404). 'Impressions at Bayreuth' allows us to estimate her changing opinions on this opera. At the same time, the letters complement the essays in

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[2] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, Volume 1, p. 289.

that they also record that Woolf was thinking about technique, for she says of *Parsifal*, 'I expect it is the most remarkable of operas; it slides from music to words almost imperceptibly' (p. 406), which also indicates combination. Both Quentin Bell's biography and Hermione Lee's study of Woolf draw attention to the impact this visit had on the writer.[4] It is, of course, no surprise that Woolf should have been influenced by Wagner, because Wagner's operas and aesthetic theories were widely known and were the focus of much critical thinking on the arts, being explored not least by Nietzsche, by many of the European Expressionist groups, and by Diaghilev and the *Ballets Russes*. Many more recent studies of the Modern period, including John Louis DiGaetani's *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*[5] and Eksteins's *The Rites of Spring*,[6] record the impact that Wagner had on European thinking. In fact, Eksteins states that, 'By the 1890s ... a Wagner wave was under way, and the pilgrimage to Bayreuth had become a fad' (p. 49). Wagner's theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a theory based on the idea that art would achieve its greatest impact from the combination of all the art forms, was arguably one of the most interesting to *avant-garde* groups, and Eksteins notes that, 'The search for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – for the holy grail that is the "total art form" – was actually a universal one by the end of the nineteenth century' (p. 25). Of course, for Wagner, the forum for a work capable of such supreme communication was the opera. It is this particular section of Wagnerian thinking that seems to be relevant to Woolf as it is possible, I think, to argue that Wagner's concepts of *Gesamtkunstwerk* form not simply part of Woolf's cultural background, but influence the way in which Woolf writes and the

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[3] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1994), Volume 1, p. 404.
[4] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 148-150, and Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus , 1996), p. 242.
[5] J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1978), pp. 11 – 20.
[6] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Bantam Press, 1989), pp. 48 – 50.

techniques she uses in her fiction; and it is, therefore, important to look at what Wagner meant by the term *Gesamtkunstwerk.*

Wagner's theories on this subject are largely set out in 'The Artwork of the Future'. A key theme in this work is unity, and an important part of Wagner's motivation for his theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* seems to have come from his feeling that, 'The disconnected was so peculiarly the character of operatic music'.[7] Wagner went on to state that:

> The new form of dramatic music will have the unity of the symphonic movement; and this it will attain by spreading itself over the whole drama, in the most intimate cohesion therewith, not merely over singular smaller, selected arbitrary parts (p. 229).

In Wagner's thinking, the artwork of the future, which would be achieved through dramatic means, would combine elements of the other arts to create a totality. Reviewing Wagner's use of this concept in *Opera and Its Symbols*, Robert Donington states that, 'The whole object of Wagner's celebrated *Gesamtkunstwerk* was to assimilate words and music and staging in one totality'.[8] Eksteins states that Wagner's operas aimed:

> not only at uniting all the arts but also at elevating his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, his total art work, to a position where it was the supreme synthesis and expression of *Kultur*, a combination of art, history, and contemporary life in total drama.[9]

These interpretations indicate the importance that Wagner placed on combinations of arts and on synthesis for his 'artwork of the future'. Such

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[7] R. Wagner, 'The Artwork of the Future' in *Wagner on Music and Drama*, selected and arranged by A. Goldman and E. Sprinchorn, translated by H. Ashton Ellis (New York: Da Capo, 1988), p. 229.
[8] R. Donington, *The Opera and its Symbols: The Unity of Words, Music, and Staging* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 101
[9] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 77.

ideas became an important field of investigation. Eksteins notes that by the time the Russian Ballet arrived in Paris, 'The arts, in part because of the enormous influence of Wagner, had moved steadily towards each other' (p. 25), and while many doubted the technical possibility of the 'artwork of the future', Wagner's theories did become an important part of aesthetic theory lasting well into the twentieth-century.

Before looking at the impact of theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* on Woolf's contemporary Modernist world, it is important to note how such ideas of combination can be perceived in the work of the Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic and Symbolist movements which were the immediate predecessors of Modernism. These earlier movements showed an interest in synaesthesia and it is here that Wagner's theories can be detected. Lothar Hönnighausen, in *The Symbolist Tradition in Literature*, states that in some cases, 'synaesthesia evokes a mood blurring the contours of the real world',[10] yet he notes that at its best it is both purposeful and effective. He asserts that in O'Shaughnessy's poem, 'Music and Moonlight', Chopin's music is used as a leitmotif, 'which, synaesthetically fused with the descriptions of the colours and jewels of an exotic landscape, leads to an aesthetic and mystic climax' (p. 128). This is very like the effect that Woolf ascribes to the operas in the two essays quoted. Hönnighausen also draws attention to Dawson, suggesting that he was aiming to achieve a similar effect in 'Chanson Sans Paroles', as was Custance in 'Peacocks', and he suggests Rossetti's failure to achieve this in 'Sudden Light' (p. 94).

Comments on the later theories of these movements are also relevant and seem to move us closer to Wagner. Hönnighausen states that 'The romanticists were fascinated with the interrelationship of the arts because they yearned for a world-view rendered harmonious by the unifying power of the

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[10] L Hönnighausen, *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: a study of Pre-Raphaelite and fin de siècle*, condensed and translated by Gisela Hönnighausen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 106.

imagination', and he notes that this was 'the driving impulse behind Wagner's ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*' (pp. 115-6). Late romantic synaesthesia of the Aesthetic and Symbolist movements works through oxymoron and correspondence, often, for example, comparing visual images to sound, and Hönnighausen considers the development of this idea when he says that, 'Many later romantics believe[d] that poetry [could] only free itself from the impact of Victorianism by borrowing from other arts like music and painting, arts characterized by non-conceptual qualities' (p. 118). For artists such as Aubrey Beardsley, Wagner's ideas were a supreme influence on their work. This led to Chan stating of Beardsley that he was:

> not the only English artist who made the most of Wagner's dramas, but perhaps the only Symbolist in England who seemed able to aspire towards a Wagnerian style of composition in which images served the same purpose as the composer's leitmotif.[11]

G. F. Watts, in his article, 'The Present Conditions of Art', recorded what Barbara Bryant describes as 'his thoughts on the connection he hoped to see between poetry, music and art'.[12] Henri Fantin-Latour's understanding of the ways in which music, poetry and the stage could instill emotion in an audience has been seen as 'proof of the efficacy of Wagner's belief in the concept of the total work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.[13] In France, Mallarmé was also experimenting with Symbolism. Dee Reynolds states that Mallarmé 'sees the task of poetry as freeing both objects and words from contingent, individual

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[11] Quoted in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860 -1910*, ed. Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997), p. 189.
[12] Barbara Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision' in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts, Symbolism in Britain 1860 – 1910*, p. 72.
[13] In the catalogue to *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860 -1910*, p. 214.

existence by transposing them into a network of reciprocal relationships'.[14] She also notes the ideas of Barbara Johnson on Mallarmé. Johnson states that what Mallarmé and his circle achieved provided:

> a new genre, based on principles of verse but transgressing boundaries between verse and prose and showing, by its spatial composition, that poetry can exploit the visual, musical and performative potential of language, rivaling the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (p. 108).

The above movements all share a profound interest in Wagner. They all provide a traceable part of Woolf's cultural heritage and they lead directly to the Modernism of the early twentieth-century. It is now important to look at the transition to Modernist aesthetics and the impact that Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory had on this.

Debates about the possibility of theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* had become commonplace in aesthetic circles in the early twentieth century and, of course, this made an impact on the Modern movement. Woolf noted as a key moment of transition for the Modern movement the year 1910.[15] The importance of this year for the Modern movement is by now well established, so Woolf's initial identification of this year as one of supreme significance is therefore understandable.[16] In 1910, the Modern movement had impinged on the consciousness of European society in a significant if at times unorthodox way. This year saw the death of the Rousseau whose influence on the young

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[14] Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 30.

[15] Woolf noted, 'In or about December 1910 human character changed ... All human relations shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature.' Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed* (London: Hogarth, 1950), p. 91.

[16] Two recent studies have focused on the importance of this year. Thomas Harrison in *1910 The Emancipation of Dissonance* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), looks at 1910 in the context of European Modernism, while Peter Stansky looks at the importance of this

Orphist painters Virginia Spate makes clear.[17] It also witnessed new directions in Cubism.[18] It was the year Léger first came into contact with the Cubist movement (p. 119). On 11th February 1910, the Futurists had published *The Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*, while 8th July 1910 witnessed Marinetti's visit to the campanille overlooking the Piazza San Marco in Venice, when he and other Futurists threw their manifesto, *Contro Venezia Passatista*, to the crowds below (p. 157). During 1910, Boccioni hosted a one-man show in Ca' Pesaro (p. 157), and Wassily Kandinsky was writing his very influential theory of art, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[19] In June of the same year, Igor Stravinsky was in Paris for the première of *The Firebird*, commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev.[20] All had awareness of Wagner's theories as a profound part of their nineteenth-century heritage and all were to some extent using theories of combination which were at the heart of much Modernist thinking.

Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury community was, of course, becoming increasingly aware of these trends. Arguably the most important event of 1910 for Woolf's aesthetic theory, and the reason why she initially focuses on the December of 1910 as a determining point in Modernism, was the opening of Roger Fry's 'First Post-Impressionist Exhibition' held at the Grafton Gallery. This event caused disunity and conflict in the way that many of the other Modernist events had done. However, the theories that Fry sought to bring to the attention of the British public were really not that radical for while Gill Perry points out:

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year for Woolf and her group in Bloomsbury in *On or About December 1910 - Early Bloomsbury and its Intimate World* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[17] Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris 1910-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.17.

[18] John Golding, *Visions of the Modern* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p.70. Golding states that 'Braque's work of 1910 is also informed by new sensations of light that re-enforce the tactility of his space.'

[19] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Wittenborn, 1970 c 1947), p. 48.

[20] Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 2.

> in 1910, introducing his own translation of Maurice Denis's article on Cézanne, Roger Fry wrote of "... a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry",[21]

this in fact hints at an evaluation of what one art could gain from the others, which is central to Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Indeed, while evaluating the impact of the Modernist movement, which provides the context for Woolf's work, it is important to remember that Modernism was, in fact, an aesthetic movement encompassing *all* the arts: visual, aural and literary. Modernism demanded a loss of the barriers between the different arts, ultimately a kind of alliance between the major art forms: painting, literature, drama and music, which was in essence what Wagner was advocating in 'The Artwork of the Future'. Modernist painters, writers, dramatists and musicians found increasingly that their art forms were linked and could learn from the techniques of the other arts. This alliance would provide the harmony that they sought. Painting, dramatic and musical analogies played a vital part in this fusion. It is this alliance that is important to Woolf's work. Wagner's writings on *Gesamtkunstwerk* emphasize that the artwork he envisaged was to be the artwork of the future and that it would be formed by breaking with older methods and allegiances. While Wagner obviously saw himself as the creator of this artwork, his own works only in part realized his dream. He is more usefully seen as the initiator of the idea, for Wagner's work provided the foundation stone for the Modernist artwork of the future. It became the quest of Modernism to push the boundaries further.

References to the impact of combinations of the arts can be found in the theoretical writings of many facets of the Modern movement. The French painter, Matisse, was extremely conscious of connection between the arts. A

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[21] C. Harrison, F. Frascina, G. Perry: *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*: *The Early Twentieth*

comment particularly characteristic of his Modernist position is, 'Each relationship of tone, I have found, should produce a chord of living colours, a harmony like that of a musical composition'.[22] Such a statement suggests his understanding of the importance of one art assimilating techniques from another to form the ultimate art form. It is even more significant when it is realized that what Matisse conceived of as harmony was, more often than not, interpreted as a form of dissonance by the public, which invites us to draw parallels between Matisse and what came to be known as atonality in Modern composition, a concept which is associated with Debussy, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. If Matisse pushed his ideas too far in later years, and André Gide felt that he did ('Matisse makes you mad, Matisse is more dangerous than absinthe'),[23] his earlier ideas and paintings provide a basis for an understanding of the underlying motivation of Modernism.

There are other artists, particularly in France, who were motivated by an interest which involved exploiting the 'musical' properties of painting. In 1899, Gauguin had said to a friend, 'Think of the musical role which colour will play in modern painting. Colour, which vibrates just like music is able to attain what is most general and yet most illusive in nature - namely its inner force'.[24] Gauguin was undoubtedly interested in synaesthesia,[25] and Rex Last notes that Gauguin 'described painting as the most complete art form on the grounds that perception involved instantaneous synthesis'.[26] By 1912 there is evidence to suggest that the connection between painting and music was becoming more sophisticated. Virginia Spate, writing about the Orphists

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*Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 204.

[22] Raymond Escholier, *Matisse: From the Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), p. 81.

[23] Raymond Escholier, *Matisse: From the Life*, p. 103.

[24] Gauguin cited in Alan Bowness, *Modern European Art* (London: Thames and Hudson , 1972 re-printed 1995), p. 61.

[25] Ingo F. Walther, *Paul Gauguin: The Primitive Sophisticate,* trans. Michael Hulse, Benedikt (Koln: Taschen, 1993), p. 50. This writer notes that Gauguin's most sophisticated attempt at this kind of painting was *Joyeuseté* of 1892.

[26] R. W. Last, *German Dadaist Literature: Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp* (New York: Twayne Publications, 1973), p. 56.

(whose very title suggests their connection with music), notes that Picabia stated in a New York article, 'Art resembles music ... To a musician words are obstacles to musical expression, just as objects are obstacles to pure art expression'.[27] Cubist techniques were specifically associated with music by Roger Fry, for although Christopher Butler, in *Early Modernism*, notes Fry's rejection of Cubism, he draws attention to Fry's understanding that 'the logical extension of such a method [as Picasso's] would undoubtedly be to give up all resemblance to natural forms, and to create a purely abstract language of forms - a visual music'.[28]

Similar tendencies can easily be seen in Expressionism. Roger Fry described *Cannons* by Wassily Kandinsky as 'pure visual music'.[29] Kandinsky, having seen Wagner's *Lohengrin*, noted,

> I saw all my colours; they stood before my eyes. Wild almost crazy lines drew themselves before me ... I realized that art in general is much more powerful than I had thought, and painting could develop the same kind of powers that music possessed.[30]

Reynolds draws attention to the fact that 'In *Reminiscences*, [Kandinsky] recounts that Wagner's music awakened synaesthetic visions of colour existing as independently of objects as musical tones'.[31] She also records how Kandinsky worked on Greek dance with the composer Thomas von Hartmann. Kandinsky painted pictures based on fairy tales and he and Von Hartmann tried to imagine the equivalent form of ballet with Kandinsky remarking that

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[27] From Hapgood, 'A Paris Painter' quoted in Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris 1910-1914*, pp. 317-8.
[28] Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 218.
[29] Quoted in Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 18.
[30] Quoted in H. K. Roethel, *The Blue Rider: with a catalogue of the works of Kandinsky, Klee, Macke, Marc and other Blue Rider Artists in the Municipal Gallery, Munich* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1971), p. 23.

'certain gestures, distinguished by their extreme schematism possess a superhuman power of expression' (p. 211). Kandinsky's theory of art, influenced by Matisse's sound theory, and set out in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, was a precise one which included both the properties of literature and those of music in relation to painting. Part of this link was contained in Kandinsky's theory of colour, which was of profound importance to his work. He outlines theories of the psychological effects of colours, while rejecting the 'purposelessness of copying an object'.[32] Yellow, blue and green are singled out. Yellow is associated with manic madness, and is said to be of the earth. Blue has depth that yellow lacks, and has a celestial quality. Green is the product of the two when movement has stopped. It is restful. White 'acts upon our psyche as a great absolute silence, like the pauses in music that temporarily break the melody' (p. 60). Black is a final pause after which 'the circle is closed'. It must, therefore, be associated with death. Kandinsky's theory of colour is of importance, not just for an understanding of symbolism in art, but also because it suggests that painting has a specifically musical level. He felt that one word repeated gained 'unsuspected spiritual properties' (p. 34), and if repeated often could be entirely deprived of meaning and achieve a state of 'pure sound':

> Similarly, the symbolic reference of a designated object tends to be forgotten and only the sound is retained. We hear this pure sound, unconsciously perhaps, in relation to the concrete or immaterial object (p. 34).

He makes assertions that this 'music' is 'more transcendent than the reverberations released by the sound of a bell, a stringed instrument, or a fallen board' (p. 34). Music was so important to Kandinsky, because he saw it as the only art that had remained true to itself, and had not sought refuge in

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[31] Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art*, p. 126.

reproduction, and he felt that it was natural for the painter to seek to apply musical techniques to his art. Similarly, he says that 'In this direction lie great possibilities for the literature of the future' (p. 34). Ultimately, Kandinsky stated, 'Harmony today rests chiefly on the principle of contrast' (p. 66). This must link to the musicians' new theories, which will be explored briefly below.

In fact, the use of images and words to convey sound became an important concept for many *avant-garde* groups such as the Expressionists, the Cubists, the Futurists and even the Dadaists. The Expressionist, Max Beckmann, noting the sounds of war, had said, 'I wish that I could paint that sound'.[33] Another Expressionist, August Macke, wrote in 1907:

> At the moment I find all my happiness in pure colour. Last week I tried to put some colours together without thinking of particular objects like figures or trees ... The miracle that makes music so mysteriously beautiful works its magic in paintings too. Only it needs tremendous vision to co-ordinate the colours like musical notes. Colours have their counterpoint, their treble and bass clefs, their major and minor keys, just as music does.[34]

Other even more radical Modern groups had expressed similar ideas. Joshua Taylor notes that the Futurist, Russolo, was interested in synaesthesia. Taylor states that early experiments, such as *Perfume* in which Russolo used colours and shapes to evoke scent, were succeeded by more ambitious works such as *Music* of 1911, in which 'a dark violet musician seated at a keyboard, creates a music that spirals and radiates around him illuminating variously colored masks that correspond to the differing moods of the music'.[35] Taylor also

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[32] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 48.
[33] Quoted by Richard Cork in *A Bitter Truth*, p. 95.
[34] August Macke, in H. K. Roethel, *The Blue Rider*, p. 89.
[35] Joshua C. Taylor, *Futurism*, catalogue for the exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, May 31st – September 5th 1961 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 25.

quotes Boccioni who spoke of wanting to do a series of paintings in which 'colour becomes a sentiment and a music in itself' (p. 35), and he notes that Severini's *Dancers* 'invites us to experience, almost kinesthetically, the exhilarating action of the dancer' (p. 66). Juan Gris stated of his Cubist methods, 'Mine is an art of synthesis'.[36] Even the Dadaists seem to have been motivated by the concept of combinations of the arts, for Arp states that in Dadaland, 'we turned to the fine arts ... we pasted, we recited, we versified, we sang with all our soul'.[37]

It is therefore hardly surprising that Modern music was evolving its own theories of combination also. It is worth looking briefly at what was happening here. The Modern revolution in music was arguably initiated by Schoenberg. Malcolm Bowie states that 'Schoenberg's new music, like Freud's new psychology, brought into view a world of unstoppable transformational process'.[38] His *Kammersinfonie* No1, Op. 9 provoked riots when it was first heard, because it represented a total departure from the basic foundations of traditional musical composition. Schoenberg, in his use of atonality, was motivated by a recognition that music had become a form of social conditioning. Schoenberg created a system based on what seemed to traditional listeners to be dissonances, and here, clearly, he can be linked to painters contemporary with him. It is known that Kandinsky was interested in Schoenberg's work and that Schoenberg liked the artist's *Yellow Sound*.[39] However, what Schoenberg achieved was a kind of complexity that tended to alienate even his most educated listeners. Butler comments, 'In the *Kammersinfonie,* Schoenberg's abandonment of the unifying effects provided

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[36] Quoted in Kenneth E. Silver, Silver *Esprit de Corp: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914 - 25* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), p. 34.
[37] Hans Arp, *On My Way: Poetry and Essays1912 - 1947*, The Documents of Modern Art, director Robert Motherwell (New York: Witten, Schultz, Inc., 1948), p. 39.
[38] Malcolm Bowie, 'A Message from Kakania,' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), p. 9.
[39] Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art*, p. 209.

by underlying harmonic movement led to a stylistic confusion'.[40] Yet Schoenberg believed with Kandinsky in the ability to capture the essence of a piece of art. Stravinsky suffered a similar fate when his work *The Rite of Spring* was jeered during its première in Paris,[41] and yet such music was being used in a way that sought to connect the arts. For Stravinsky was at the time working with Diaghilev and the *Ballets Russes*, and so it is not surprising that the ballet became a new forum for *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since the idea of combination had its roots in the opera and Diaghilev, working in an environment where opera and ballet operated side by side, saw ballet as the perfect forum for the extension of this sort of experimentation.

Of course, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, always at the forefront of the *avant-garde*, was similarly and perhaps even more profoundly interested in the combination of the arts than any of the fine art groups. Richard Shead notes:

> *Le Pavillon d'Armide* was a true collaboration between the choreographer, the composer (Tcherepnine) and the designer (Benois), and this notion too was a complete novelty: it was also the first appearance of the balletic aesthetic which was to dominate all Diaghilev's work for the stage – the Wagnerian idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[42]

Lynn Garafola goes so far as to suggest that *Gesamtkunstwerk* formed 'a theoretical framework' for the *Ballets Russes*.[43] Eksteins points out that 'Diaghilev claimed that ballet contained in itself all the other art forms' and that this was the foundation for his *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory,[44] and Buckle says that

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[40] Christopher Butler in *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*, p. 50.
[41] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993, first published 1979), pp. 252 – 3. Buckle gives an account of the reaction of the Paris audience.
[42] R. Shead, *Ballets Russes* (London: Greenwich Editions, 1998), p. 22.
[43] L. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 45.
[44] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 24.

> Diaghilev had invented a new art form, the ballet as *Gesamtkunstwerk*: an entertainment, not more than an hour long, in which all the elements, story (if any), music, décor and choreography, were all commissioned by himself to form a complete work.[45]

Diaghilev was not the only one to see ballet as the forum for the ultimate combined work of art. Silver records how Léger, working at the ballet studios of Rolfe de Maré, 'considered the theatre to be the ideal medium for a collective aesthetic, and his ideas as expressed in an article of 1924 are a kind of updated version of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.[46] All these comments serve to illustrate Gill Perry's comments in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, that:

> The dream of a synthesis of all the arts was one which possessed the artistic avant-gardes in various forms, from the Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ... of the 1880s, to that Modern Movement fantasy of the 1930s which saw the well-designed housing estate as a spiritually fulfilling environment.[47]

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As the sister of the painter Vanessa Bell, and sister-in-law of the art critic Clive Bell who brought her into contact with Fry, Woolf was well aware of movements in the world of painting, although she was inclined to be rather sceptical about some of them. On 24th December 1912, after the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Woolf wrote to Violet Dickinson, 'The furious excitements of these people all the winter over their pieces of canvas coloured

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[45] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 182. He notes that *Petrushka* was to carry this further.
[46] Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, p. 303.
[47] Gill Perry, in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, p. 205

green and blue is odious'.[48] She was conscious of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in English art and had knowledge of the English heritage of painting. Her mother's family connections meant that she knew about Pre-Raphaelite art and subsequent movements that grew out of it. Mitchell Leaska gives a clear account of Julia Stephen's connections through her Aunt Sara Princep who lived at Little Holland house and held regular meetings of Pre-Raphaelite painters.[49] Vanessa's son, Quentin Bell, states, in *Bloomsbury*, concerning his mother and his aunt that 'although they rejected the aesthetic of Little Holland House, they did not reject the assumption that the visual arts were supremely important'.[50] Woolf arguably shows awareness of some of the techniques of these previous movements. For example, she hints at understanding of the possibility of synaesthesia, an idea of significance to these groups, for it is interesting to note that while talking about autumn in an early diary, Woolf had quoted from Tennyson's 'Tithonus' the lines: 'The woods decay - the woods decay & fall -/ The vapours weep their burden to the ground'.[51] She then made the following comments:

> But for me the definite touch that has spelt autumn is the subtle difference in the air. It brings with it odours of burning wood & weeds & delicious moisture from the shaven earth; it is cleaner and more virile, it is autumn in its youth, before decayed woods & weeping vapours have come to end its substance. We saw weed burning on the hill. Look at the picture of Sir John Millais of children burning leaves & my theories will be revealed. I cannot attempt to explain in words the charm and melancholy, the colour and interest of the picture.[52]

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[48] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 15.
[49] Mitchell Leaska, *Granite and Rainbow: The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 27.
[50] Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury* (London: Weidenfeld& Nicholson, 1968), p.40.
[51] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897*, edited by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1992), Wednesday 20th September 1899, p. 161.
[52] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, Wednesday 20th September 1899, pp. 161-2.

Such comments suggest her profound, if at times intuitive, understanding of English art. In fact, Woolf was also well aware of subsequent developments in English art. In 1905 she had visited the Whistler exhibition in Regent Street, commenting, 'Oh lord, the lucid colour - the harmony - the perfect scheme'.[53] Her comments are worth attention because of their reference to music and because musical titles are so important in Whistler's work. Her interest in Walter Sickert, about whom she wrote an essay, is also significant for he must also provoke connections with music. (Cork notes 'Sickert's desire to paint similar piano pictures like *Chopin*', [54] which hints at Sickert's interest in musical subjects.) Such interests prepared the way for Woolf's later understanding of Post-Impressionism.

It is now important to look at what the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition added to Woolf's knowledge. This exhibition was momentous because it developed her awareness of European, and specifically French, painting. She noted her reaction to the exhibition:

> Now that Clive is in the van of aesthetic opinion, I hear a great deal about pictures. I dont [sic] think them so good as books. But why all the Duchesses are insulted by the Post-Impressionists, a modest sample set of painters, innocent even of indecency, I cant conceive. However, one mustn't say they are like other pictures, only better, because that makes everyone angry.[55]

Her comments also show, incidentally, that she was aware of English critical objections to these paintings. Looking back when she wrote her biography of Roger Fry, Woolf would try to assess the impact of the exhibition:

> It is difficult in 1939 ... to realize the violent emotions those pictures excited less than 30 years ago. The pictures are the

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[53] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 220.
[54] Richard Cork in *A Bitter Truth*, p. 55.
[55] Letter to Violet Dickinson, Sunday [27 November 1910] in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 440.

> same; it is the public that has changed ... The public of 1910 was thrown into paroxysms of rage and laughter ... The pictures were a joke and a joke at their expense.[56]

Yet Woolf was quick to see the value of such artists and the exhibition did bring her into contact with the work of many of the painters noted earlier and with others whose ideas were influential. It is, I think, possible to see the significant impression the ideas of these artists had on her fiction. Of course, one interesting omission from the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition was the work of Wassily Kandinsky. Although Fry had visited Munich in 1910 as he amassed pictures for the Grafton Gallery exhibition, he did not actually take any paintings from this painter with his radical musical theories of connection. Yet while Fry did not take any of Kandinsky's paintings for the exhibition the fact that he made a trip to Munich suggests that Bloomsbury had this painter's work very much in their minds. It is, of course, more important to note what Woolf and the British public would have seen at the Grafton Gallery. Amongst the paintings exhibited were Matisse's *Woman with Green Eyes,* Picasso's *Nude Girl with A Basket of Flowers*, Van Gogh's *View of Arles, Iris, Cornfield with Crows*, and one of his *Sunflower* series, as well as paintings by Cézanne, Gauguin, Derain and Seurat.[57] All formed a part of Woolf's education as she was striving to establish herself as a writer.[58] Woolf would acknowledge her debt to Fry. Indeed, later in her career when she wrote her biography of Roger Fry, arguably one of the most interesting sections of this work for an analysis of combination in Woolf's fiction is the one where Woolf seeks to suggest the significant role that Fry played in promoting understanding of this new art. She notes in this section, 'he would explain that it was quite easy to make the transition from Watts to Picasso; there was no break only continuation. They

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[56] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1940), pp. 153 -154.
[57] Peter Stansky, *On or About December 1910*, pp. 174-8.
[58] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, pp. 315 – 16.

were only pushing things a little further'.[59] This suggests that at least part of Woolf's conception of Modernist theories grew out of a sense, assisted by her understanding of Fry's ideas, that these theories were part of a transition from nineteenth-century ideas, they were not diametrically opposed to them. This too forms an important part of her fiction's commentary on art, as I shall show in the section on *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf also records further debts to Fry, for she notes that Fry's understanding of painting forced his companions to perceive connections between the arts. She states: 'the Post-Impressionist movement as casual words show was by no means confined to painting. He [Fry] read books by the light of it too. It put him on the track of new ideas everywhere' (p. 172) and this suggests awareness of connections. Her inclusion of Fry's questions, 'Why, he demanded, was there no English novelist who took his art seriously? Why were they all so engrossed in the childish problem of photographic representation?' (p. 164) is another important statement, not just because of the part Fry played in furthering Woolf's knowledge of how one art could influence another, but also in suggesting that combination was the key to aesthetic communication. Woolf also suggests that Fry felt, 'Literature was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way, writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit' (p. 172). So, the fact that Modern painting became a significant influence on Woolf in the years after 1910 is important because it marks a step on the path towards a total art theory in Woolf's work. The appearance of the Stephen girls as 'indecent Gauguin girls' at the Post-Impressionist Ball was the beginning of this involvement for Woolf.[60]

However, Woolf was also making further connections, for while she might have declared in 1925 in an essay called 'Pictures' that Modern writers

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[59] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry*, p. 152.
[60] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 291

were 'under the dominion of painting',[61] her novels actually seem to suggest that music was just as important as painting. And again, Fry's influence can be sensed, for the description of connections with music formed an equally important part of his critical work. His assertion while writing about the French Post-Impressionists, that:

> The logical extreme of such a method would undoubtedly be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form - a visual music; and the later works of Picasso show this clearly,[62]

provides just one example of Fry's use of musical comparisons in his critical work. This desire to create what Fry termed a 'purely abstract language of form - a visual music' indicates another important point of contact between the arts in the Modern movement. Woolf was very aware of this connection. I have already noted the influence of musical theory on some of the most influential painters of the period. It is now important to look further at Woolf's experience of music.

Woolf's knowledge of Wagner has already been established and it is important to note that music was every bit as much a part of her daily diet as painting and in some ways arguably has a more obvious influence on her fiction (*The Voyage Out* being at least in part about the place of music in the novel). Woolf attended many concerts such as the Beethoven concerts at the Wigmore Hall in 1917.[63] Her letters show that she was familiar with new music too; she notes, 'I went to hear a new sonata for harp flute and viola yesterday'.[64] (Indeed, early critics noted the link between her writing with the

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[61] Virginia Woolf, 'Pictures' in *The Moment* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), p. 140.
[62] Roger Fry, 'French Post-Impressionists' in *Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981), p. 167.
[63] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, to Saxon Sydney Turner, 16 January 1917, p. 135.
[64] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, to Saxon Sydney-Turner, 3 February 1917, p. 140.

Modern Movement in music. Neville Cardus, writing for *The Manchester Guardian* in 1932, stated, 'A man might as well hang himself as look for a story, a plot in *To the Lighthouse*, or in the Third Symphony of Arnold Bax'.[65]) Woolf also read about music and talked about music.[66] And it is worth mentioning the fact that the essay 'Pictures' (1925) finds its musical counterpart in the very much earlier essay 'Street Music' of 1905.[67]

'Street Music' is important because it sets out Woolf's initial thinking on the powers of music, ideas to which she returns on many occasions. For example, in 1906, Woolf wrote to Violet Dickinson, 'I do think all good and evil comes from words. I have to tune myself into a good temper with something musical'.[68] Her perception of the power of music can also be sensed in her evaluation of the experience of going to a concert, which she recorded in February 1915 after a visit to the Queen's Hall. Woolf states:

> It struck me what an odd thing it was - this little box of pure beauty set down in the middle of London streets, & people - all looking so ordinary, crowding to hear, as if they weren't ordinary after all, or had an ambition for something better.[69]

On both occasions, Woolf seems to be adding to ideas set out in 'Street Music', where she asserts the importance of rhythm, while suggesting that the musician is an outcast because he 'has not yet learned to speak with human voice'.[70] In this essay, her theories seem to display a connection with the ideas of Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, providing another link with Wagner. Nietzsche's ideas, which are very much based on combinations of arts outlined in the definitions of the Apolline and Dionysiac forces in life, are important for *Mrs*

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[65] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, in 5 volumes (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977-1985), Volume 4, Monday 8th Feb 1932, p75.
[66] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, to Vanessa Bell, 24th February 1919, p. 334. She writes about a conversation with the poet Sir Henry Newbolt.
[67] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. A McNeillie, Volume 1, p. 29.
[68] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, 30 Dec. 1906, p. 274.
[69] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, 13th February 1915, p. 33.

*Dalloway* as I shall be arguing. In 1915 in her diary, Woolf acknowledged once again music's superiority by noting the inadequacy of words to describe music, stating 'descriptions of music are quite worthless, & rather unpleasant; they are apt to be hysterical'.[71]

However, Woolf's ideas on the part music plays in theories about the combination of the arts goes further and, perhaps more significant than any of the above comments, is the fact that as early as 1901, fifteen years before she published *The Voyage Out,* which does seem to deal specifically with the place of music in the novel, Woolf had contemplated the power of music noting in a letter to Emma Vaughan:

> The only thing in the world is music - music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying - unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven - no human element at all, except what comes through Art - nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation.[72]

Such a comment, however tentative and imprecise, is significant because it links literature and painting with music while suggesting the superior power of the latter. And, in 1906, the year after the publication of 'Street Music', Woolf wrote to Violet Dickinson:

> I have been having a debauch of music and hearing certain notes to which I could be wed - pure simple notes - smooth from all passion and frailty, and flawless as gems. That means so much to me and so little to you! Now do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?[73]

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[70] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 29.
[71] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, Saturday 13th February 1915, p. 33.
[72] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, 23 April 1901, pp. 41-2.
[73] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, 16 Dec.1906, pp. 263-4.

This comment in its appropriation of the terms of painting to describe music is like the theories of many Modern painters, and it indicates the developing thoughts of a writer for whom theories of combinations of the arts would form an important part of her mature fiction.

And, having established that Woolf was thinking very clearly about combinations of the arts, it is now necessary to outline one further area of influence on Woolf's work, for I shall argue that Bloomsbury's connections with Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* not only provided a connection with musical Modernism but also brought Woolf into contact with a company that was specifically interested in combining the arts, a company whose ideas grew out of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories. As I have suggested earlier, the practice of staging ballets necessarily involves the combining of the arts and Diaghilev's aspirations to establish a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his ballets have already been noted. It is now important to outline Woolf's connection with this company. Again, this is a connection for which she was indebted to Fry. While Lynn Garafola charts Bloomsbury's interest in the stagecraft of the ballet, she also makes it clear that Fry's and Bell's initial impressions of *Ballets Russes* stagecraft were not necessarily favourable and were characterized by a feeling that dance and music were more radical than the stage sets.[74] However, the fact that Bloomsbury was discussing the techniques of the ballet does suggest that Woolf would have been aware of, amongst other things, Debussy's and Stravinsky's innovative music and Diaghilev's and Nijinski's radical experiments. The fact that Bloomsbury seems to have provided the inspiration for the ballet *Jeux* suggests the extent of connection between these two influential groups.[75] There were other significant points of connection. For example, an interest in marionettes shown by Fry in 1919, led to the exhibition of marionette designs at Fry's *Omega Workshops* by Mikhail

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[74] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 317–319.
[75] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 234.

Larionov who designed for the ballet company.[76] And earlier, in 1915, Nina Hamnett's husband, Roald Kristian, put on a marionette show at the Omega Workshops run by Fry. The show involved the movement of the marionettes to the music of Debussy's 'Bôite a Joujoux'. This also seems to be a response to stylized *Ballets Russes* ideas.[77] These links with Bloomsbury and the fact that Woolf herself was no stranger to performances by the ballet company (in the years after the war Woolf records various trips to Diaghilev ballets),[78] account for what I believe to be a demonstrable interest by Woolf in *Ballets Russes* ideas; this interest has, I think, a profound effect on her mature work

Yet it is also important to realize the generally profound impact made on London by Diaghilev's company which provides the context for Bloomsbury's interest. For example, when the Russian Ballet performed at Covent Garden on 21st June 1911,[79] the writer in the *Daily News* noted:

> The glitter of spangles and glare of colour which offend the eye in most ballets in London were absent, and the combination of exquisite colouring, graceful movement, sprightly, but never banal, music made a spectacle surpassing in artistic feeling and charm anything yet seen in this country.[80]

The *Times* reporter stated that 'the stage-management of the whole was among the most purely artistic things the stage has ever seen'.[81] The fact that combinations of art forms and stage-management are mentioned in the above articles is important here. Woolf's knowledge of this company's work, whose profound connections with Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* are widely

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[76] Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and their Circle* (London: Phaidon Press, 1976 and 1993), p. 181.
[77] J. Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, p. 104;also in Richard Shone in *Bloomsbury Portraits*, p. 141.
[78] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, to Lytton Strachey, October 12 1918, p. 281, to Saxon Sydney-Turner, 11 June 1919, pp. 366-7.
[79] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 204.
[80] Quoted in Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 205.

acknowledged, is reflected in both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. In the later novels, the theatre is clearly important to Woolf's theory and, while it is necessary to note that practitioners such as Gordon Craig would have been known to Woolf through Bloomsbury's interest in them,[82] we can, in fact, see in Woolf's work, not just an understanding of experimental theatre but, more specifically, as I will argue in the section on *The Waves*, the assimilation of the theories of Diaghilev's company. Familiarity with the company's work allowed Woolf to experiment with her own form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

It is, indeed, not surprising to see such experimentation in the work of a writer with Woolf's cultural background and Woolf consistently explores ideas which have their foundations in painting, music and the theatre. In some novels of course there is a greater emphasis on the exploration of one of the arts rather than all. However, as Woolf's writing evolves, so we can see her increasingly turning to the stage for both metaphorical interpretation and for technique. It is also notable that music forms an important part of all her theories. Sometimes, particularly in the early novels, Woolf's experiments involve an examination of theories and ideas; for example, *The Voyage Out*, as I have already suggested, looks specifically at what the Modern novelist can learn from the techniques of the musician, while *Jacob's Room* explores the world of Modern painting. However, in the later novels the exploration of theory is mixed with a much more elaborate experimentation with technique. Thus, as I shall show, *Mrs Dalloway* owes something to Nietzschean interpretation of Wagnerian thinking, while in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* Woolf experiments with her own form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. These later novels, together with *The Years*, demonstrate Woolf's interest in what the novel can learn from dramatic and cinematographic theory and are necessarily based on the importance of combination. Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*,

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[81] Quoted in Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 205

seems initially to be a statement about the failure of such theories to provide the dreamed of method of ultimate communication which combination was supposed to offer. However, on closer inspection, it is I think a statement on the fact that the Modern world has failed to provide the forum for such a work. For in the essay, 'A Letter to a Young Poet', written late in Woolf's life, she seems still to be sure that combination provides the answer. In fact this essay could arguably be said to sum up her ideas on combinations of the arts, for her message to the 'Young Poet' is to:

> Stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut ... until one thing melts into another, until the taxis are dancing with the daffodils, until a whole has been made from the fragments ... let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows ... until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole;[83]

and this suggests that Woolf still had faith in theories of combination. The passage quoted immediately above is vital to an understanding of Woolf's evaluation and implementation of a theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk.* It implies that unity is possible for the artist, and that unity involves drawing together different aural, visual and spatial impressions as well as movement and action. This, as we have seen, was not a new idea, but one that Modernism was developing and redefining in its own idiom. Unity is the central theme running through Wagner's theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and is inherent in Modernism; as such it forms an integral part of Woolf's work. It is in fact fair to describe the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or the search for 'total artwork' as a major preoccupation in Woolf's work. In affirming the importance of combination, Woolf places emphasis on the significance of the theories and techniques of

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[82] Roger Fry wrote an essay on Gordon Craig. Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs,' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1996), p. 288

[83] Virginia Woolf, 'A letter to a Young Poet' in *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 140.

other arts in literary Modernism. This thesis will now explore the nature of Woolf's theories of combination as they emerge in her fiction.

## Chapter 2: *The Voyage Out* and the Place of Music in the Novel

> It would seem on the face of it that literature has always been the most sociable and the most impressionable of them all [the arts]; that sculpture influenced Greek literature, music Elizabethan, architecture the English of the eighteenth century, and now undoubtedly we are under the dominion of painting.[1]

In this statement, made in the essay 'Pictures', written in 1925, Woolf is acknowledging the interrelationship of the arts. She is looking at the impact that one aesthetic discipline can have on another. The possibility of the arts combining to aid expression is a concept that Woolf was to explore and develop throughout her career. It is, therefore, not surprising to note that it is this very complex and arguably controversial field of inquiry that Woolf chooses to address in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. An examination of the origins of this concept in *The Voyage Out* is vital to an understanding of Woolf's ideas on synaesthesia and *Gesamtkunstwerk* which form crucial aspects of the later novels' aesthetic stances.

Although evidence can be found to link *The Voyage Out* to significant movements in the world of Modern arts of all kinds through the use of themes and motifs, and while it is clear that her later novels are equally indebted to the arts of painting, architecture and arguably the performing arts of theatre and ballet, *The Voyage Out* is very much an examination of the important part that music played in Woolf's theory of Modern Art. The novel is an exploration of Woolf's earlier realization while listening to Wagner, 'we are miserably aware of how little words can do to render music',[2] and Woolf uses her first novel to pose many questions and explore ideas relevant to the Modern Movement. All are connected to the importance of the understanding of music's place in Modern theory.

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[1] Virginia Woolf, 'Pictures' in *The Moment*, p. 140.
[2] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 291.

The most obvious thing to note is that in this novel Woolf chooses to present the reader, not with a potential writer as the central character, but with Rachel Vinrace who has a natural sensitivity to music. The potential writer is not excluded, he exists in the rather limited form of Terence Hewet. However, his position as a secondary character is no accident. By providing us with both musician and writer, Woolf is already suggesting the complicity of the two arts. Her presentation of Rachel and Terence as separate individuals with different values indicates the distinct identities of their representative art form, while the characters' growing closeness suggests the affinity of literature and music. Rachel's sensitivity to music is highlighted very early on in the novel so that we are in no doubt as to music's significance. Woolf's depiction of Terence's art as the weaker of the two is also emphasized by his subordinate position. The focus for Woolf is initially clearly the power of music.

The first really important examination of this power comes after the first part of the literal 'voyage out' has taken place. It involves an exploration of the nature of different types of music and an examination of the ways in which human beings respond to music, both psychologically and physically. This investigation centres on a dance, which can be identified as a metaphor for Modernism. The choice of a dance is symbolically significant, and Woolf's choice of symbol is not co-incidental. The dance is carefully chosen (in spite of Woolf's mistrust of symbolism) for its historical symbolic potential. To understand the generic significance of Woolf's choice of the dance, it is worth looking briefly at some historical and contemporary examples of uses of dance symbolism. The dance has a tradition going back to the ritual dances of Bacchus, and extends through the Christian Dances of Death which Kathi Meyer-Baer outlines in *The Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death*.[3] In more recent times, dance is used by Jane Austen, in *Pride and Prejudice*, to heighten

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[3] Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984).

moments of connection between Elizabeth and Darcy.[4] Austen's treatment of the dance frequently shows the refinement of this ritual and presents us with the sort of situation that Woolf's characters demand. However, Austen was not unaware of dance's less civilized side, for early in this novel, in response to Sir William Lucas's comment that dancing is 'one of the first refinements of polished societies', Darcy draws attention to the fact that 'Every savage can dance'. [5] And, Hönnighausen, reviewing the Pre-Raphaelites, notes a similar kind of savagery, stating that 'Baudelaire and Symons as well as O'Shaughnessy, for instance, frequently connect the image of the serpent with the dance'.[6] A dance is also a vital symbol in the early stages of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where the rather sinister rituals of the May dance seem to prefigure Tess's sacrifice.[7] The fact that the dance is often associated with primitive ritual as well as the refined ritual of the civilized world has a particular relevance for Modernism, several branches of which were openly advocating Primitivism as a means of self-expression, while maintaining a sort of unity.[8]

If the dance has a long and reasonably distinguished career as a symbol in literature, it is also associated with other arts such as music and painting. In the field of music, the production of Stravinsky's piece, *The Rite of Spring*, in 1913, with its innate dance connection, finds its origins in Nicholas Roerich's work on ancient slav cultures, and explores the idea of young virgins dancing and isolating a victim.[9] The work of Diaghilev's company in Paris and London

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[4] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 1994).

[5] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 22.

[6] L. Hönnighausen, in *The Symbolist Tradition*, p. 240, states that ' the fusion of erotic, spiritual and aesthetic elements, the ultimate aim of symbolist mysticism, is the motivation behind many depictions of the dance in this period'.

[7] It is perhaps worth noting Woolf's early impressions of this novel which are given in 1903 in *A Passionate Apprentice*, pp. 205-6. Here Woolf remarks, 'All is set forth with an almost savage insistence; the writer is so sternly determined that we shall see the brutality of certain social conventions that he tends to spoil the novel.'

[8] Gauguin, who was noted for his examination of primitive cultures, had exhibited at the *First Post Impressionist Exhibition* in 1910 which is recorded by Peter Stansky in *On or About December 1910 - Early Bloomsbury and its Intimate World*, pp. 180-1.

[9] Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*, p. 115.

emphasized the scope of dance to encompass free expression. Primitivist experimentation can be seen in Matisse's *La Danse* (1909) where he adapted a circle of dancers from an earlier painting, *Le Bonheur de vivre*. In the later painting, the dancers are seen to gyrate, which Butler says shows an 'indebtedness to the Bacchic dancers on Greek vases'.[10] The circle indicates connection, while the nudity of the figures makes their lack of self-consciousness clear. Such images form an important part of the interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas, shown in *The Birth of Tragedy*, on Dionysiac forces which are in opposition to the more civilized Apolline regime. This will be looked at in much more detail in the chapter on *Mrs Dalloway*. What all these examples serve to illustrate is the divided role assumed by the dance concept as both a symbol of civilization and as a symbol of free expression. It is this dual role that is explored by Woolf for the first time in the dance depicted in *The Voyage Out* and it is the nature of this depiction that must be investigated now.

Rachel has been asked to provide music for the dancers when the professional musicians have left. What she provides is 'the dance for people who don't know how to dance' (*VO* 165). This is an idea which must have appealed to Woolf, who suffered agonies when taken to parties, and who wrote to Violet Dickinson in December 1902, 'I would give all my profound Greek to dance really well'.[11] Yet the idea of learning to dance assumes a different significance in Woolf's novel where Rachel, soon exhausting her knowledge of dance music, plays an air from a Mozart sonata. In doing this, she is offering a fundamental challenge to the dancers, because she is forcing them to perform in an unfamiliar manner. Their routinely learned waltz steps will not fit, and the music demands that they use their imaginations to interpret the music, encouraged by Rachel who tells them to 'invent the steps' (*VO* 165). Although the piece of music by

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[10] Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*, p. 37.

[11] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 63. The section called 'A Garden Dance', in *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897*, pp. 169 – 72, records preparations for and subsequent attendance of a dance, as does 'A Dance at Queen's Gate,' pp. 164-7.

Mozart may be classified as traditional, Woolf's treatment of it is not conservative, because the response demanded of the dancers is unconventional. The piece is being used in an unfamiliar context; it does not belong in this place at this time yet has what might be termed timeless appeal. Symbolically, this is an idea that is of importance to Woolf's own Modernist techniques, which arguably consider the validity of the arts breaking their own confining boundaries and inhabiting unfamiliar territories. This invites questions about the possibility of combinations of the arts, a concept, as has already been discussed, explored by Wagner and furthered by Modern practitioners in Woolf's contemporary society.

However, Woolf is not simply interested in practitioners and artists, she is also interested in audience. The use of the dance provided her with an opportunity for a further field of inquiry: the question of the audience's interpretation of the familiar music in an unfamiliar context is central to this section of *The Voyage Out*. Rachel's challenge to the dancers requires a response, and Woolf uses this to examine the sort of demands that the Modern arts were making on the general public. Thus, Rachel becomes the modern practitioner seeking to promote a new way of thinking, a role that she will take on in an even more significant way in the education of the Modern novelist, Terence Hewet, later in the novel. In order to make the passage from the old way of thinking more accessible to the dancers, Rachel 'marked the rhythm so as to simplify the way' (*VO* 165). In highlighting the rhythm, Rachel is identifying something which both the familiar and the unfamiliar have in common. Woolf was, of course, aware of Roger Fry's attempts to establish new paintings in England, and Rachel's endeavours are, in fact, not unlike Fry's who, in promoting *Manet and the Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in 1910, had been required to smooth the way for his audiences. According to S. K. Tillyard in *The Impact of Modernism,* 'Like Art and Craft writers, early Modernists saw pure

form and simplicity as antithetical to the representation of natural fact'.[12] So Fry had drawn very heavily on the language of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a language with which his erudite audience would have been familiar, in order to gain acceptance for the new works. Similarly, when Fry published the *Omega* prospectus he made sure that it used a language that would be familiar (p. 49), and he employed similar techniques in promoting the first of the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, ensuring that articles about the paintings were placed in between articles on more familiar ideas which were connected to the style he was promoting. For instance, in the *Burlington Magazine* of November 1910, Fry placed an article on Van Gogh in between an article by Binyon on Chinese painting and one on 'Hispano-Moresque Carpets' (p. 98). In *The Voyage Out*, although Rachel's demands of the dancers may seem to be revolutionary, and her choice of music is unusual in this situation, the piece by Mozart is a piece with which many members of the audience might be expected to have been familiar and so might offer a reassuring introduction to a novel situation.

However, what must be acknowledged is that the very reason for the dancers' dismay at Rachel's playing Mozart lies in the realms of familiarity. They feel able to take part in a waltz because it has a clearly defined set of steps which they have been taught since childhood. It is part of their routine. Woolf was well aware of the allure of the waltz. In 'A Dance at Queen's Gate', she had written, 'the swing & lilt of that waltz makes me almost feel as though I could jump from my bed & dance too'.[13] She would re-visit this memory when she wrote *The Years*, and *Between the Acts* also shows the power of waltz music. The waltz, however, relies on the routine of a series of learned steps and eventually this is associated, in Woolf's novels, with banality. It is interesting that Woolf also sees in dance music its power to stir 'some barbaric instinct - lulled asleep in our sober lives - you forget centuries of civilization in a second' (p. 165). Here she

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[12] S.K.Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p. 49.

seems to be acknowledging the latent Dionysiac qualities in all music which have both positive and negative consequences, and which she would explore in much more detail in later novels. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel is asking the dancers to move away from the security of their routine. She is also asking them to respond more instinctively. This was the sort of demand which artists were making of their audiences all over Europe, and Woolf is using her novel to explore ways in which this departure could be achieved. The dance becomes a symbol of self-expression, a departure from the conventional waltz.

The dance's association in *The Voyage Out* with the lack of self-consciousness that free expression allows is important, since it is this that engenders self-expression. The reader is told that St John Hirst is in 'possession of the anatomy of a waltz' (*VO* 152), but it is said that his dancing is weak. The waltz precludes any sort of self-expression, and it makes the dancers acutely aware of their ability to perform the steps, rather than aware of the music to which they dance. It is possible to see a link here with conditioning by society, from which Modernism sought to escape. While Rachel dances well 'because of a good ear for rhythm' (*VO* 152), St John 'had no taste for music' (*VO* 152). It is significant that this man, who could be Mr Ramsay in embryo, should be described in this way because it suggests the difficulty of the Modern movement's task. St John's initial rejection of music marginalizes its significance. Yet even St John, once he has stopped trying to perform the waltz, can hear the rhythm so, as he 'hopped with incredible swiftness first on his left leg, then on the right' (*VO* 165), he may look ridiculous, but this is a form of self-expression and Woolf is suggesting that it is a more honest response to the music than the waltz. It is notable that she again chooses rhythm as the method of salvation for St. John as she had identified this as a means of reaching a wider audience.

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[13] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, p. 165.

St John is not alone, and the reactions of the other dancers must also be noted because they can be interpreted as further comments on the attitude of the public to Modernism's assault on the traditional boundaries of the arts. Woolf presents Rachel's wider audience as initially uncomfortable because of the loss of a fixed set of rules, which means that individuals have to think for themselves. As they become aware of the rhythm as accentuated by Rachel, so 'they showed a complete lack of self consciousness' (*VO* 165). This suggests that human beings have a natural sensitivity to rhythm so that, despite the fact that 'the tune changed to a minuet ... the tune flowed melodiously ... the tune marched' (*VO* 165), the characters find themselves able to adapt to these changes. They have reached beyond the tune and understood the rhythm, which Woolf had suggested was necessary for understanding and psychological and aesthetic advance in 'Street Music' in 1905:

> The beat of rhythm in the mind is akin to the beat of the pulse in the body; and thus though many are deaf to tune hardly any one is so coarsely organized as not to hear the rhythm of its heart in the words and music and movement. It is because it is thus inborn in us that we can never silence music ... it is for this reason that music is so universal and has the strange and illimitable power of a natural force.[14]

This concept is central to Woolf's Modernist theory, and the ways in which she built on this concept of the power of rhythm in her later novels will be explored further. However, in this essay, Woolf's theory seems to exhibit not just a Modern influence, but also more ancient sympathies which the Moderns liked to draw on. Woolf's theories seem to show a sympathy with ideas advanced centuries before by Augustine in *De Musica* and outlined by Kathi Meyer-Baer:

> We are able to measure rhythm and time because these qualities of motion outside of us correspond to qualities of the internal

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[14] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. A. McNeillie, *Volume 1*, p. 30.

> motion in our soul. External motion - Augustine is here following Plotinus - is perceived in space, internal motion can be realized only through sound ... therefore, music is the link that establishes a harmonious relationship between the outer and inner worlds and life.[15]

Many of these ideas were things that the Modern artists of different genres were concerned about. As we have seen, interpretations of Wagnerian and Nietzschean thinking pay attention to the importance of sound. Both Matisse and Kandinsky were interested in the musical properties of colour and the rhythms that could be associated with these, while Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were experimenting with sound in poetry. The Modern quest was undoubtedly about the discovery as far as was possible of the 'internal motion', and references to 'space' and 'sound' have obvious relevance. St John and the dancers do symbolize the audience of Modern art. As they begin to take part in the dance they are those who listen to the internal motion, while Rachel is the practitioner who gives it expression. By the end of the dance the dancers no longer doubt the sanity of Rachel in choosing the Mozart piece. Woolf seems almost to be suggesting that we should not question the expertise of Modern practitioners (Matisse was dismissed for his poor technique by many contemporary critics), or see them as absurd or insane, but should celebrate their insight. She could in fact be writing an apology for her future fiction. Measurement of expertise, absurdity and sanity are after all part of a plethora of conditions dictated by the tastes of society, based on moral values and premises which art may or may not interpret. Woolf would explore such issues in more detail in her presentation of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*.

For the dancers in *The Voyage Out*, the 'unusual' music has not only enabled them to find self-expression, it has also allowed them to find a different kind of community and feeling. And in this, Woolf seems to be

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[15] Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death*, pp. 344-45.

exploring with Nietzsche the allure of the Dionysiac forces over their Apolline counterparts. *The Voyage Out* shows that Woolf was well aware of the dual powers of dance which she was to look at in considerable detail in *Mrs Dalloway*. The waltz recognizes the individuation of the Apolline world, its emphasis on the successful accomplishment of routine steps indicating the ego. Yet Woolf herself had noted in 'A Dance at Queen's Gate' that in spite of its allure, 'the waltz drags a little - the pulse wants vigour'.[16] In her novel, the Dionysiac world of free expression is represented in the communal effort that the dance eventually becomes. This is developed by Woolf's water imagery in her descriptions of the dance and its music which is heavily reliant on the idea of the circle (another idea that she had developed from the 'Queen's Gate' piece.)[17] Woolf's dancers in *The Voyage Out* form one large circle, their individuality is subsumed within a larger entity. It is also worth noting that Woolf is using shapes, the medium of painting and architecture, to describe both the music and the literal shapes that the characters make as they dance. She points out that when the music stops, 'the circles were smashed into separate little bits' (*VO* 151).

To conclude comments on the dance section, it is worth taking time to consider the structure of this section, which offers a further important insight into the nature of the progression of Modernist thinking. Rachel's music has a four-fold effect on the dancers. First, it excites them into unpremeditated frenzied action and self-expression. Second, it brings them together in their general movement in spite of their varied responses to it as they form a large circle. Then it calms them as they listen to it. Finally it provides a moment of understanding. These can be interpreted as four stages that the Modern Movement passed through on the voyage to a plain of stability and influence, as Woolf's description of the dancers' progress could be seen to be that of the

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[16] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, p. 166.
[17] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, p. 166. Woolf writes 'Round and round - in the eddies

Modern Movement. First, the discussions and the words, then the decision that words were inadequate and that symbols were required, and finally, the movement towards music with the possibility of a fourth suggestion of the moment of connection through synthesis. As I shall argue later, Woolf would return to a similar idea in the writing of *The Years*. For the music obviates the need for the 'incessant chatter' of gossip; this represents the growing unease amongst Modern practitioners about the precision of language. As Susan in *The Voyage Out* says, 'It [music] just seems to say all the things one can't say oneself' (*VO* 167). She tries to say more, but looked as though she 'could not find the words in which to express it' (*VO* 167).

In negating the dancers' need for words, the music is in turn transformed into a series of images:

> Their nerves were quieted; the heat and soreness of their lips, the result of incessant talking and laughing, was soothed away. They sat very still as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. They began to see themselves, and the whole of the human race advancing to music (*VO* 166).

This is one of several architectural parallels drawn in *The Voyage Out*. For Rachel, as she plays, 'an invisible line seemed to string the notes together from which rose a shape, a building' (*VO* 167). The architectural imagery anticipates Woolf's use of such associations in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* and in both novels it is similarly associated with music.[18] It is also important once again to acknowledge Roger Fry's developing ideas in art criticism where architectural

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and swirls of the violins.'

[18] The identification of architecture with music and painting was an idea which was growing in significance at the time that Woolf was writing *The Voyage Out*. Roger Fry clearly became interested in this and Jed Pearl records its impact on Fernand Léger in *Paris Without End: On French Art Since World War One* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988), p. 43. The narrator's imagined architectural visions for the characters also look forward to Forster's comments in 'The Raison d'Être of Criticism', 'I should hear it as an entity, as a piece of sound architecture', published in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 126.

language was being used, which will be looked at in much more detail in connection with *To the Lighthouse*. This was a significant theory for the Modern Movement where geometrical shapes were becoming more and more significant and where geometry was finding its ultimate expression in Cubism, along with concentration on the circle in Vorticism.[19] However, it is vital to remember that such ideas were not the isolated property of Modernism or of a more ancient world. They were not born out of a wasteland, but were developed from the immediate predecessors of the Modern artists. They have their roots in Nietzsche's interpretations of Wagnerian aesthetic theory recorded in *The Birth of Tragedy* and, as has been shown, such ideas also informed English Pre-Raphaelitism and the movements that grew out of this. To note just one example, Robyn Asleson in an essay on Albert Moore draws attention to the musical quality of his painting entitled *A Musician*. She states that 'the regularly spaced vertical elements establish a rhythm in the background, while the irregularly rising and falling curves in the foreground sing the melody'.[20] Asleson also looks at the impact of early nineteenth-century research into the measurements of ancient Greek architecture and sculpture, noting:

> These discoveries generated fresh interest in the reconstructing of the Greek's 'secrets' of ideal beauty. These were believed to hold the universal key to the relationships of nature (to include human proportion) and all the arts – sculpture and architecture as well as music, poetry, geometry, arithmetic, perspective and painting. ... Hints culled from a variety of ancient authors instilled the belief that music held the key to unravelling this mystery through its geometric system of harmonic proportion.[21]

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[19] It should be noted that the ancient Greeks regarded geometry as 'the visual impression of the laws of universal harmony' according to Michael Hayes, *The Infinite Harmony: Musical Structures in Science and Theology* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994), p. 94.
[20] Robyn Asleson, 'Nature and Abstraction in the Aesthetic Development of Albert Moore', in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 127-8.
[21] Robyn Asleson, 'Nature and Abstraction in the Aesthetic Development of Albert Moore', in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn, p. 128.

In fact, Woolf clearly acknowledges music's supreme powers. It is worth repeating that, in her diary of February 13th 1915, Woolf had written of her amazement at the pull of the Queen's Hall with 'people - all looking so ordinary, crowding to hear, as if they weren't ordinary after all, or had an ambition for something'.[22]

This idea of music providing stimulus and motivation is crucial and it is important to note at this point Woolf's debt to another late nineteenth-century figure, Walter Pater. Pater's ideas arguably grew from symbolist interpretation of Wagnerian thinking. Perry Meisel, author of *The Absent Father* which is about connections between Woolf and Pater, in *The Myth of the Modern* states that in *Between the Acts*, 'Woolf ... glosses the musical model from the angle of Pater's own antithetical vision'.[23] It is possible to suggest that Woolf's connection with Pater is evident from this first novel, which arguably asserts with Pater that all art is constantly 'aspiring towards the principle of music'.[24] It was Pater's belief that art was,

> always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only, nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter ... present one single effect ... It is the art of music which most completely realizes this artistic ideal.[25]

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[22] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume1, p. 33.
[23] Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern: A Study of British Literature and Criticism After1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1987), p. 57.
[24] Walter Pater's 'The School of the Giorgione' (1877), in *Essays on Literature and Art,* ed. Jennifer Uglow (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1973), pp. 50 –51.
[25] Walter Pater's 'The School of the Giorgione' (1877), p. 53. Woolf, who studied Greek with Pater's sister, Clara, would acknowledge her debt to Pater in the preface to *Orlando*.

This realization of the need for a kind of pure form is one that was to become increasingly relevant to the Modern movement. Ultimately, the dance section of *The Voyage Out* looks at the power of the music, and the culmination of this is the Paterian vision of the human race advancing to music. This places Woolf firmly in line with those who had advocated a theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk.*

If all art constantly aspires 'towards the principle of music' as Pater asserts, then there is one paradox which is fundamentally central to the position of the Modern writer. Words, which have evolved to engender expression, seem to be inadequate to this task. This becomes the pivotal point of the novel's other major field of inquiry. Throughout *The Voyage Out,* Woolf is exploring ways in which Modern novelists can adapt the properties of other art forms to allow communication. At the beginning of the novel, Rachel decides, 'nobody ever said a thing they meant, or talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for' (*VO* 32). By assigning these thoughts to Rachel, the central character, Woolf is suggesting that music has greater powers of expression than literature, because it does not distinguish between matter and form, which accords with the ideas Pater set out in 'The School of the Giorgione'. However, it is also interesting to note that Rachel's innate understanding of music sets her apart from others, so that she is marginalized or isolated. This is a position that Woolf had identified with the musician in 'Street Music'.

Woolf was not alone in seeing a character with a sensitivity to music as an isolated individual. It seems relevant here to make a comparison between Rachel and Forster's Lucy Honeychurch in his 1908 novel, *A Room with a View.* Both play with great feeling and both are slightly removed from the people around them as a result. To Rachel, music exposes 'what one saw but did not talk about' (*VO* 32), probably because there are no words for expression. To both girls, music provides a means for making the world around them more bearable, as Forster

states: 'It so happened that Lucy, who found daily life rather chaotic, entered a more solid world when she opened the piano',[26] while Rachel,

> Absorbed by her music ... accepted her lot very complacently... Inextricably mixed in a dreamy confusion, her mind seemed to enter into a communion, to be delightfully expanded and combined with the spirit of the white boards on the deck, with the spirit of the sea, with the spirit of Beethoven Op.112 (*VO* 33).

And Forster, like Woolf, suggests that music has transcendental qualities asserting, 'The kingdom of music is not the kingdom of this world'.[27] Such concepts are Wagnerian in origin.[28] In both novels the main character's success is linked to the understanding of the truth that the music seems to impart. Whereas Rachel must simply articulate this to explain it to Terence Hewet, the Modern novelist, so that it will help him to write the novel about silence, Lucy has to acknowledge that words cannot articulate what music imparts to her. When she tries to explain the significance of the music to Mr Beebe at the Florentine pension, she can get no further than 'Music – ' before she returns to the banalities of 'Poor Charlotte'.[29] For both girls, the recognition of absolute pure truth means that they must break with some of the social codes instilled in them since childhood, in pretty much the same way as the committed Modern artist must break away from the bonds of convention

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the presentation of these heroines in that Lucy's feelings are quickened by music and she 'never knew her desires so clearly as after music',[30] while Rachel's senses are lulled into acceptance of her situation. So while Mrs Honeychurch might 'disapprove

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[26] E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 50.
[27] E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 50.
[28] Forster used music further in *Howards End*. J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, gives an account of Forster's ideas in relation to Wagner's thinking, pp. 91 – 108.
[29] E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 52.
[30] E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 60.

of music, declaring that it always left her daughter peevish, unpractical and touchy',[31] it is not the music that is at fault, but the conflict between the music's message and the society in which Lucy has been brought up. Lucy must allow herself to feel. However, in Woolf's novel, music is used as a kind of panacea for female desires for power. Thus, music seems to be offered as a way of preventing Rachel from thinking about important issues so that when she is asked by Terence whether having the vote would make any difference to her, she replies, 'Not to me ... but I play the piano' (*VO* 213), a kind of inner emancipation working against the public. Lucy must eventually break away from Cecil, because, although he does have some awareness of her intuitive musical understanding, it is deadened by his strict, frigid, 'English' up-bringing. Lucy must act upon the desires that the music has quickened in her. Ultimately this means the acceptance of George Emerson and an unconventional life-style. Rachel is clearly different in that music does not strengthen her desire for personal relationships, it further isolates her; Terence 'liked the impersonality which it produced in her' (*VO* 298). This is why Rachel's Aunt Helen fears that music is too great a strain, and is uncertain about the effect that it has on her niece (*VO* 122). The books that Helen and Terence encourage Rachel to read provoke questions such as 'What is the truth? What is the truth of it all?' (*VO* 122). Eventually she is able to offer the answer, 'It was only a light passing over a surface and vanishing, as in time she must vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain' (*VO* 124), an image which of course prefigures *Jacob's Room, To The Lighthouse* and some of the ideas in *Between the Acts*, and hints at the cinematographic arts. Interestingly, Rachel ends the book, not with the promised marriage to Terence but with the transcendence of death, another Wagnerian idea.

When Terence notes 'the impersonality that it [music] produced' (*VO* 298) in Rachel, he is, in fact, noticing a nihilistic strain based on transcendence, one

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[31] E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 61.

that can be found in Modernism. This idea also has its origins in Wagnerism and can be seen in the German Expressionist movement which will be looked at further in the examination of *Mrs Dalloway*. Knowledge of the importance of this nihilism is one of the messages that Rachel has for Terence. The Modern novelist was moving more and more into a world where creation involved the subsuming of the identity of the author, as can be seen in ideas expressed in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.[32] What Terence in *The Voyage Out* needs to understand is that this movement, which seems so negative to him, is not in fact negative at all, the negativity lies in the human interpretation. This is one of the lessons that Bernard will learn at the end of *The Waves* when he comes to understand that many of the things that we consider to be negative, are only negative because of the terms used to describe them, which is arguably an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of language. Perhaps Terence should seek the impersonality of the music. This is Rachel's message to him.

Woolf uses the characters in her first novel as major tools for exploring the issue of how an understanding of music can inform the novel. The depiction of Rachel and Terence and the development of the relationship between them allow for the presentation of key passages of dialogue on the subject of art which seem to be advocating a more holistic approach to the novel. J. K. Johnstone in *The Bloomsbury Group* suggests that it was Fry's regret that 'comparatively few novelists have ever conceived of the novel as a single perfectly organic aesthetic whole'.[33] Woolf seems to suggest even at this early stage that such a whole could be achieved only through learning from the other arts, and music is fundamental to this quest. The proposed union between Rachel and Terence means that a symbolic marriage is promised between music and literature, if a connection can

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[32] Stephen, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, realizes when he outlines his theory of art to Lynch that: 'The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluent and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak': James Joyce *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 233.

[33] J.K. Johnstone *The Bloomsbury Group: A Study of E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and their Circle* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), p. 60.

be made. Terence is to write 'a novel about Silence ... the things people don't say' (*VO* 220); Rachel, the musician, questions Terence's desire to write a novel:

> 'Why do you write novels? You ought to write music. Music, you see' - she shifted her eyes, and became less desirable as her brain began to work, inflicting a certain change upon her face – 'music goes straight for things. It says it all at once. With writing, it seems to me, there's so much' - she paused for an expression ... 'scratching on the match-box' (*VO* 211-12).

In this section, Rachel seems very much the precursor of another of Woolf's artists, Lily Briscoe, who demonstrates a similar difficulty when trying to communicate an aesthetic theory and whose struggle will be looked at in a later chapter. It is also interesting to note that Rachel becomes 'less desirable as her brain began to work' (*VO* 211), just as the male characters in *To the Lighthouse* find it difficult to find Lily attractive. Traditional male values are being challenged. It is, of course, significant that initially Rachel cannot find the words in which to express the failure of the novel, and it is important that when she is able to talk about it, she uses a metaphor, an image, which shows her ambivalence. This is the crux of the Modern writer's problem, and it suggests that the way forward is to harness the qualities that give music the power which Rachel has attributed to it. As George Steiner would note years later, when language 'seeks to disassociate itself from the exactions of clear meaning ... it will tend towards an ideal of musical form'.[34] Rachel is adhering to an age-old idea that music is more direct than words, because its meaning is not diluted. This is akin to Yeats's idea in 'Symbolism in Painting':

> If you liberate a person or a landscape from the bonds of motives and their actions, causes and their effects, and from all the bonds of your love, it will change under your eyes, and

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[34] George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.47.

> become an infinite emotion, a perfected emotion, a part of the Divine Essence.[35]

This has an obvious implication for conceptions of music, which lacks the referential qualities of the other arts. All of Rachel's ideas of the world are image based. She asks Terence, 'Does it ever seem to you ... that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter and that we're nothing but patches of light?' (*VO* 299-300). However, while Rachel is clearly an advocate of Modernist ideas, Terence remains part of a realist tradition. His answer, 'I feel solid' (*VO* 300), to Rachel's question, serves only to remove him further from the realms of the Modern artist. Rachel is giving him the answers to his problems and yet he fails to understand. She tells him, 'Think of words as compared with sounds' (*VO* 299), but Terence only likes 'nice simple tunes' (*VO* 299). Thus, he disregards the things that would make him a Modern novelist. He cannot connect the arts.

Woolf lived in a society where *avant-garde* arts were borrowing techniques, terms and references from each other. Schoenberg and his contemporaries turned to literature in order to overcome the structural weaknesses they perceived in the 'new' music; Schoenberg collaborated with Maeterlink to produce *Pelleas and Melisande*, the latter's story providing the shape for forty minutes of music. As Malcolm Bowie says in 'A Message from Kakania', commenting on Andersen's *Die Seejungfrau* and Maeterlink's piece: 'the warring passions and the triangular love-drama that each sets forth could be thought of as a non-musical expedient for achieving a musical end.'[36] The link is a profound one. Kandinsky believed that combinations of colours could provide musical harmonies. Rachel's understanding is not solely musical but based also on an understanding of shape, and as such it is close to Kandinsky's conception of painting. However, the mission of the Modernist was not an easy one;

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[35] W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 148-9.
[36] Malcolm Bowie, 'A Message from Kakania,' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies, p. 10.

Stravinsky's new music was felt to be too dissonant when it was first performed in Paris. Therefore, Rachel's attempt to make Terence see the connection between the novel and music is an important one. She tells Terence that he should turn to sound and music to give the novel the diversity of expression that he requires. She tries to communicate with him through the use of symbols, but Terence stubbornly ignores her message.

Rachel's death is, in fact, the symbolic failure of the union attempted between music and literature at this point. It is significant that it is Rachel, the musician, who achieves the transcendental state of unbeing. However, her death does offer Terence a moment of transcendence as well:

> This was death. It was nothing; it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union that had been impossible while they lived. Unconscious of whether he thought the words or spoke them aloud, he said, 'No two people have ever been as happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have loved.' (*VO* 360-61).

Woolf wrote to Lytton Strachey that she had wanted 'to give the feeling of the vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again.'[37] Terence's achievement of a moment of being is significantly linked with the image of the circle as 'their complete union and happiness filled the room with rings eddying more and more widely' (*VO* 361). This unites the imagery of death with that occasioned by the music at the dance. Ironically, Terence's interpretation of the experience falls short of the truth, because we know that Rachel had not wanted the total union he envisages. She had wanted to retain her identity, just as the parts of a painting and the notes of music remain individual in spite of their place in the scheme of a piece. *Gesamtkunstwerk* within the novel is as yet just a possibility. Having

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[37] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, 28th February 1916, p. 82.

initiated the idea of the possibility of a union between the arts, Woolf leaves the field of inquiry open to be explored further in her later novels.

## Chapter 3: Theories of Painting and Music in *Jacob's Room*

> This gloom, this surrender to the dark waters which lap us about, is a modern invention (*JR* 148).

*Jacob's Room* does seem to demonstrate the 'surrender to the dark waters' that Woolf describes in it. If *The Voyage Out* is on one level a novel about the journey to be made by the Modern novelist from realism to a more abstract kind of art through music, *Jacob's Room* arguably represents the first part of the quest outlined in the first novel. It too is looking at the importance of music but it is also extending the inquiry the first novel initiates. As the first part of a 'voyage out', this novel demonstrates the removal from what is familiar, and looks at the problems of what such things as plot and detailed character description and true-to-life depictions can be replaced with. *Jacob's Room* is still very much setting the scene. It indicates no final destination. Yet, while referring to music as in the earlier novel, one of this novel's major aesthetic concerns is arguably an exploration of the art of painting. One of its chief purposes seems to be to raise awareness of important aesthetic issues and to compound the earlier novel's insistence on the importance of combination.

The narrator in *Jacob's Room* points out, 'The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to everyone for hundreds of years, no one has left any adequate account of it' (*JR* 103). It is important to note that the word 'life' is one that Virginia Woolf was trying to redefine. In 'Modern Novels' (1919),[1] Woolf attacks contemporary 'realist' novelists. Arnold Bennett is, she declares, 'catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side' (p. 285). She goes on to say, 'So much of the enormous labour

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[1] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Novels' in *The Modern Movement*, ed. John Gross (London: Harvill, 1992), pp. 283 – 289. The article was originally published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in April 1919. Woolf subsequently revised the essay and it was published as 'Modern Fiction' in *The Common Reader* in 1925. The two quotations used next appear in the form used here in both essays. These

of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of conception' (p. 285). Woolf's aim in *Jacob's Room* was to avoid such pitfalls, and to verify her most famous comments, ideas initiated in 'Modern Novels' and revised to form the statements quoted below when published as 'Modern Fiction':

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?[2]

This assertion is interesting not just for the insight that it gives us into the position of the Modern novelist as Woolf sees it, but because she is dependent on images in her attempt to give precision to her ideas. Woolf had allowed Rachel in *The Voyage Out* a similar dependency. The imagery that Woolf uses in the essay is significant because, once again, it defines her work in terms of that of other Modern practitioners of different disciplines. Baudelaire, in 'The Painter of Modern Life', speaking of the solitary artist's need to use his imagination to try to catch 'that indefinable something we may be allowed to call modernity', had said that, 'The aim for [the artist] is to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distill the eternal from the transitory'.[3] Although Leonard Woolf wrote in a letter to Nancy Bazin in 1964, 'I don't think she [Virginia Woolf] was influenced by

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references are taken from 'Modern Novels' in *The Modern Movement* and page numbers are given in brackets.

[2] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966),Volume 2, p. 106.

[3] Charles Baudelaire 'The Painter of Modern Life' in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*: translated by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 402.

Baudelaire's ideas',[4] it cannot be denied that connections can be made between Woolf's ideas and Baudelaire's 'envelope'. Woolf seems to be developing this line of thinking. For Woolf the 'semi-transparent envelope' is not a symbol of total enclosure, but something that can be seen through, at least partially. It is penetrable. Furthermore, in describing life as 'a semi-luminous halo', Woolf is forcing us to make connections between herself and the Modern painters. Matisse would later say of his painting *La musique*, 'My picture ... was done with a fine blue for the sky ... green for the trees and violent vermilion for the figures. With those three colours I had my luminous harmony'.[5] Part of Woolf's quest becomes a journey to investigate this kind of 'luminous harmony', and it was something that would necessarily remove her from the contemporary realist novelist, involving the kind of alliance with the art of music looked at earlier and also an alliance with painting. *Jacob's Room* is, therefore, deliberately experimental; Woolf, writing to Clive Bell in 1922, states, 'Jacob is nothing but an experiment, as I've always said'.[6] Woolf was exhibiting a growing awareness of the imprecision of words, which in *Jacob's Room* she says 'have been used too often; touched and turned, and left exposed to the dust of the street' (*JR* 101), something she had recognized in *The Voyage Out*. Woolf's comments here suggest ultimately her lack of confidence in the power of words without image.

So *Jacob's Room* continues Woolf's exploration of the inadequacies of the language by examining what the writer can gain by appropriating ideas from the field of painting. Thus, while describing Jacob's time at Cambridge the narrator comments, 'the shape they had made whether by argument or not, the spiritual shape, hard, yet ephemeral, as of glass compared with the dark

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[4] Leonard Woolf to Nancy Bazin who was writing a doctoral thesis at Stanford University on 'The Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf' in *The Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. F. Spotts (London: Bloomsbury, 1989), p. 528.
[5] H. Matisse, 'Statements to Teriade 1929-30' in Jack D Flam, *Matisse on Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1973), p. 58.
[6] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 581.

stone of the chapel, was dashed to splinters' (*JR* 48), which suggests that combinations of words can form shapes. The imagery here is interesting precisely because of its relevance to painting, sculpture and architecture. It seems to be hinting that one possible way of giving words meaning is to endow them with 'shape', indicating a structure. It also suggests the sort of 'vital harmony' to which Forster refers in his essay, 'Art for Art's Sake'. 'Order', Forster maintains, 'is something involved from within, not something imposed from without; it is an internal stability'.[7] The need for the sense of a kind of order that shape could provide stems from the sense of the inadequacies of words alone, and generally, *Jacob's Room* presents us with a world in which gossip is rife; words are wasted and their power is lost. The party in the central section of the novel serves only to show us the things that people do not understand because they are desensitized by the web of small talk, rumour and opinion. (This is the world of the euphemism, which would dominate the press coverage of the early part of the First World War.) Woolf makes a conscious effort to create images in *Jacob's Room* so that many of the urban scenes in the novel seem not unlike Picasso's collages, a bizarre mixture of coffee tables and newspapers. These scenes also bear a resemblance to Eliot's *Prufrock* poems. It is important now to look at exactly what Modern art offered Woolf and why it seemed to provide a way out of the imprecise and tired language of the contemporary world.

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Undoubtedly, as discussed earlier, Woolf's understanding of Modern art in the years leading up to the publication of her most acclaimed novels was nurtured by Roger Fry. In *Art and Life*,[8] Fry suggested that in order to

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[7] E. M. Forster, 'Art for Art's Sake' in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 88.
[8] Roger Fry, 'Art and Life' in *Vision and Design*, ed. J. D. Bullen, p. 7.

understand the Modern Movement, it was necessary to go back to 1870 and the Impressionist Movement. While Woolf does not go back to 1870, she does place the starting point for *Jacob's Room* at the very end of the Impressionist Movement. If Jacob is in his twenties when he dies during the Great War, then the early stages of the novel are set in the 1890s, just after the period of high Impressionism in the1880s, but still during the careers of Cézanne and Monet.

The opening of *Jacob's Room* presents us with a series of Impressionist pictures. Woolf makes part of her evaluation of painting an experiment with light and colour. The first scene is bathed in light, which was of great importance to the Impressionists. We have the picture in Mrs Flanders's mind as she looks through her tears: 'The entire bay quivered; the lighthouse wobbled; and she had the illusion that the mast of Mr Connor's little yacht was bending like a wax candle in the sun' (*JR* 7). We have the painting of the artist Steele, which 'the critics would say ... was too pale, for he was an unknown' (*JR* 8). It is in greys and lavenders, and Steele's fears hint at the fact that Impressionism was being superseded by the more startling colour use of painters like Gauguin and Matisse. And we do have, in stark contrast to the Impressionist pictures, the bold images of the child, Jacob: the image of the 'large red faces lying on bandanna handkerchieves' and 'the large black woman sitting on the sand' (*JR* 10), the images of the new generation which would replace Impressionism. It could be said that *Jacob's Room* is, at least in part, an examination of different movements in painting during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, and as such shows a growing awareness of the importance of synaesthesia to the arts and ultimately a growing awareness of the importance of music in a theory of combination, of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is suggesting the possibility of transferring ideas from one artistic medium to another.

The interest in Impressionism, apparent in the opening section of the novel, continues right up to Jacob's visit to the Scilly Isles, where the sky has

an effect on the way in which the characters see their surroundings, 'the Scilly Isles were turning bluish; and suddenly blue, purple, and green flashed the sky' (*JR* 51), which seems to bear out Forster's comment on the power of the sky in *A Passage to India*: 'The sky settles everything - not only climates and seasons, but when the earth shall be beautiful'.[9] The change in *Jacob's Room* can, I think, be pin-pointed to the following paragraph of description:

> By seven the water was more purple than blue; and by half past seven there was a patch of rough gold-beater's skin round the Scilly Isles, and Durrant's face, as he sat steering, was of the colour of a red lacquer box polished for generations. By nine all the fire and confusion had gone out of the sky, leaving wedges of apple-green and plates of pale yellow; and by ten the lanterns on the boat were making twisted colours upon the waves, elongated or squab, as the waves stretched or humped themselves. The beam of the lighthouse strode rapidly across the water (*JR* 56-57).

This passage seems to suggest in essence the gradual movement away from Impressionism. It sees the introduction of deeper more vivid colours and the addition of definite shapes, 'wedges' and 'plates'. The picture of Timmy Durrant's face is not unlike the images produced by the Fauve painters, and the passage shows evidence of an interest in decoration, which was characteristic of painters like Gauguin. Here, oriental decoration is specifically mentioned which could be linked to Matisse. As the sun sets and the moon becomes visible, so the shapes become less regular. Gill Perry comments in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, with particular reference to Gauguin, that 'modern, vanguard artists ... produce[d] such non-naturalistic distortions to somehow recapture some 'primitive' essence or mode of expression'.[10] Later in the above passage from *Jacob's Room*, the words 'twisted' and 'elongated' conjure images of Cubism and Abstraction. Significantly also, in

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[9] E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 10.

the later stages of Woolf's novel, the moon which is just making an appearance here, is a far more dominant feature, and the light of the sun is frequently removed from the increasingly urban setting; indeed the magnificent sunset at the end of the novel could well indicate the end of an era. Meanwhile, the rhythms created by the waves and the lighthouse beam demand a musical analogy. The combination of these elements seems to signal Post–Impressionism of the sort promoted by Roger Fry since 1910. Tillyard says in *The Impact of Modernism*:

> Post-Impressionist painting, like the products of the Arts and Crafts Movement, was described in terms of pattern, decoration and design. These three words could be combined either with one another or with widely current metaphors of description. These were usually musical or mathematical analogies, which already carried suitable overtones of abstraction, purity and simplicity. Fry himself gave credence to the association of these metaphors by suggesting that Post-Impressionists were trying to discover the 'visual language of the imagination' and that their problems were similar to those of the musicians. Occasionally an architectural analogy was used.[11]

Clearly, Tillyard's comments are relevant to Woolf's writing, where the descriptions of both character and place were becoming increasingly patterned as Woolf's descriptions of life pay more attention to aesthetic design than to realist representation. Woolf did in fact acknowledge the part that Fry played in ensuring the vitality of the arts in England. Following his death, she wrote, 'What brought this life and colour, this racket and din into the quiet galleries of ancient art? It was that Roger Fry had gathered together the Post-Impressionist Exhibition in Dover Street'.[12]

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[10] Gill Perry in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, p. 27.
[11] S.K.Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism 1900-1920*, pp. 124-5.
[12] V. Woolf: 'Roger Fry' in *The Moment*, p. 84.

The Post-Impressionist painters, some of whom had paintings hung in Fry's exhibitions, do seem to be important for Woolf in the writing of *Jacob's Room*. Examinations of Gauguin's *The Loss of Virginity*, and Manet's *Olympia*, which obviously influenced the former artist, arguably have relevance to Woolf's portrait of Florinda and her relationship with Jacob. *The Loss of Virginity* was, according to Alan Bowness, a deliberate attempt to find a pictorial counterpart for the symbolist dramas of Gauguin's Paris.[13] We learn that Florinda's name 'had been bestowed upon her by a painter who had wished to signify that the flower of her maidenhood was still unplucked', and that she had 'lost it [her virginity] only last night' (*JR* 82 - 3). Whereas Gauguin used *The Loss of Virginity* to examine his Eve theme, for Jacob, Florinda represents the Greek: 'Wild and frail and beautiful she looked, and thus the women of the Greeks were, Jacob thought; and this was life; and himself a man and Florinda chaste' (*JR* 83), the ultimate illusion.

It is important to note that Jacob is drawn to Classicism because this introduces into the novel another debate that was very much a part of the contemporary Post-Impressionist art scene. The influential French art critic, Maurice Denis, writing in 1909, identified the influence of Classicism in the works of Gauguin and those of his contemporary, Van Gogh. Pointing out that these artists were influenced by Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas and de Chavannes, but also recognizing that they were part of a reactionary force against these earlier artists, Denis notes that, 'their synthesism or symbolism was the precise antithesis of Impressionism'.[14] He asserts further:

> And yet for the attentive observer, even in 1890, it was easy to detect in the extremism of their works, and the paradoxes of their theories the symptoms of a classical reaction ... In literature and in politics, the young are passionate for order.

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[13] Alan Bowness, *Modern European Art*, p. 6.

[14] Maurice Denis, 'From Van Gogh to Classicism' in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. F. Frascina and C. Harrison (London: Paul Chapman, 1982), p. 52.

> The return to tradition and discipline is as unanimous as the cult of the individual and the spirit of revolt were in our youth. I might cite as evidence the fact that in the avant-garde critics' vocabulary, the word 'classic' is the highest form of praise (p. 52).

For Denis, the return to Classicism meant the acknowledgement of an underlying harmony in art, which was interpreted by the individual. This is not unlike the Classical idea of absolutes advocated by Plato. To Denis, Cézanne represented the ultimate Classical painter. Roger Fry was similarly, but not necessarily as knowledgeably, interested in the concept of Classicism. In 1910 he had translated Denis's essay on Cézanne.[15] In the same year, he described Cézanne as 'the great classic of our time',[16] and went on to state of Gauguin, 'I do not always feel sure of the inner compulsion towards the particular form he chooses'.[17] Such a statement seems to suggest that Fry was not as convinced as Denis of Gauguin's claim to the title Classical. Fry explores the issue of Classicism further in other articles, stating 'by classic I mean ... the power of finding in things themselves the actual material of poetry and the fullest gratification for the demands of the imagination'.[18] However, it is not so much the intricacies of the debate that are of interest here, but the fact that this locates an interest in the concept of Classicism within Bloomsbury, and it is therefore no surprise that this becomes an area of interest for Woolf. It was a field that she would return to in the presentation of Neville in *The Waves*.

Meanwhile, in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf is exploring the Classical in order to offer a rejection of its ideals. Jacob is drawn to the Classical. His philosophy is founded on the Greek. At Cambridge, he favours the ideas of Julian-the-Apostate, who desired a Hellenist world, and who died before it

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[15] Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 128.
[16] Roger Fry, 'The Post-Impressionists II', in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed, p. 91.
[17] Roger Fry, 'The Post-Impressionists II' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 91.

could be achieved, just as Jacob will die in a war that makes a mockery of Classical order. The power of Julian's Classicism is one that Jacob experiences as something that joins things and yet significantly is beyond the power of words:

> Simeon said nothing. Jacob remained standing. But intimacy - the room was full of it, still, deep, like a pool. Without need of movement or speech it rose softly and washed over everything, mollifying, kindling and coating the mind with the lustre of pearl, so that if you talk of a light, of Cambridge burning, it's not languages [sic] only. It's Julian the Apostate (*JR* 49).

This is significant because it hints at the importance of transcendence. It seems to be impossible for either the narrator or Jacob to explain the exact nature of the experience, but the experience is consequential. Jacob's Classicism, like that which Denis ascribes to the artists he analyses, stems from a desire for order. At this point it is important to note that the Classical tradition in England at this time was not entirely of European derivation; it had an English heritage too. Richard Jenkyns records how Walter Crane wrote Hellenist poetry about the glories of Greece, 'contrasting them with the degeneracy of the industrial age'.[19] For Woolf's Jacob too, the Greek ideal represents a rejection of the commercial, mercantile order imposed by his contemporary society, and embodied in the thinking of scientists like George Plumer. The depiction of Plumer's wife, who 'grew up cheese-paring, ambitious, with an instinctively accurate notion of the rungs of the ladder and an ant-like assiduity in pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder' (*JR* 37), is particularly damning. Jacob despises people who behave in this way.

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[18] Roger Fry, 'Acquisition by the National Gallery at Helsingfors' (1911) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 136.

[19] Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 302. Jenkyns examines the importance of the ancient Greek aesthetic for the late Victorians, pp. 298 – 309.

However, Jacob is in fact replacing one form of order with another, for his Classicism represents an attempt to find an ordered way to express a reaction to life, which he does through the adoption of an aesthetic code. But, Woolf is not necessarily supporting this. It is worth noting here that in 1895, Gauguin wrote to Auguste Strindberg of:

> a shock between your civilization and my barbarism. Civilization from which you suffer, barbarism which has been rejuvenation for me. Before the Eve of my choice whom I have painted in the forms and harmonies of another world, your memories have evoked a painful past. The Eve of your civilized conception nearly always makes you, and makes us, misogynist; the ancient Eve, who frightens you in my study might some day smile at you less bitterly.[20]

Jacob seems to have the misogynist trait which Gauguin derides, and it would seem in *Jacob's Room* that even if Jacob favours the Classical, the narrator is sceptical. This scepticism comes across most forcefully in the narrator's depiction of Jacob's dealings with the female characters. In all his relationships with women, Jacob is made to feel acutely, and often the sensation is a negative one and one which involves the dislike or even hatred of women. On several occasions he feels that Florinda is 'horribly brainless' and when Fanny Elmer falls in love with him, Jacob 'was afraid of her for a moment', afraid because it is 'so violent, so dangerous ... when young women stand rigid, grasp the barrier, fall in love' (*JR* 127). Jacob's desire is to control. It is significant that he feels most comfortable with Clara Durrant, 'a virgin chained to a rock ... eternally pouring out tea for old men in waist coats, blue-eyed, looking you straight in the face, playing Bach' (*JR* 123); so that, while Jacob may feel that he is living as a Greek hero when he is with Florinda, Clara is the woman most associated with the Greek, and it is these Classical

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[20] From Goldwater, 'Primitivism in Modern Art,' quoted in Gill Perry in C. Harrison , F. Frascina and G. Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, p. 24.

characteristics that hold the key to her subservience. Clara is an Andromeda-like figure.[21] In the end, Jacob will leave her for good, and Clara Durrant will be forced to enter a new world, where such subservience is unacceptable. Yet Jacob must also recognise that he lives in a new world, for he must acknowledge that 'all this business of going to Greece seemed ... an intolerable weariness' (*JR* 146) in a world where Aristotle is a waiter in a down-market restaurant. And it is against this background that Jacob seeks spiritual respite in the arms of Sandra Wentworth Williams, and again, he misjudges the situation. He mistakes the august English woman for the essence of the Greek which he is seeking. His relationship with her is related to his search for the Acropolis, but as the narrator points out, 'as for reaching the Acropolis, who shall say that we ever do it, or that when Jacob woke ... he found anything hard and durable to keep for ever' (*JR* 172). When Jacob cries 'What for? What for?' (*JR* 172) we feel his disillusionment, but are never quite sure of his ultimate rejection of the Classical. We are, however, certain of the narrator's rejection of it. Woolf uses Jacob to examine the pull of the Classical, but she endows Jacob with a flawed understanding of Classical ideas, because, as Kandinsky said, 'it is impossible for us to live and feel as did the ancient Greeks. For this reason those who follow the Greek principles in sculpture reach only a similarity of form, while the work remains for all time without a soul'.[22] What Kandinsky realized and Woolf sets out to show is that, while the Modern Age needed to take note of the past, it had to determine its own form of expression to define the transcendent quality within life. Classicism could provide openings for understanding, but could not really offer satisfying solutions.

Significantly, while Jacob is relentlessly seeking a Classical ideal, other characters in the novel are pursuing other options which might ultimately

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[21] It is perhaps significant that in *Jacob's Room* the Scilly Isles, when mention is made of the stars, the speakers identify Andromeda, and this is the only constellation that is repeated, p. 63.

provide a forum for expression. And, ironically of course, the most interesting and radical ideas are those of Miss Marchmont whom we meet at The British Museum, and whose coughing is an irritation to the other readers. Her ideas have much to do with Modernist principles, yet she is ignored. Miss Marchmont realizes 'that colour is sound, or perhaps it had something to do with music' (*JR* 113). Miss Marchmont, like Rachel Vinrace, struggles to find the words to express what she intuitively understands, that painting, sculpture and music are linked; together they hold the answers. If 'colour is sound, or perhaps it has something to do with music' (*JR* 113) as Miss Marchmont asserts, then Woolf's ideas are provoking connections with Modern practitioners of other disciplines and with *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories. For example, it must be remembered that in 1899, Gauguin had said to a friend, 'Think of the musical role which colour will play in modern painting. Colour, which vibrates just like music is able to attain what is most general and yet most elusive in nature - namely its inner force'.[23] Miss Marchmont's words could also allude to the movement towards Primitivism of the Fauves, or she could be considering abstraction with Kandinsky and Mondrian. In any case, by raising the issue, Woolf is forcing the reader to recognize a connection between the arts, one that is fundamentally founded in an understanding of music as she had suggested in *The Voyage Out*. In his 1908 'Notes of a Painter', Matisse had said:

> I cannot copy nature in a servile way; I am forced to interpret nature and submit it to the spirit of the picture. From the relationship I have found in all the tones there must result a living harmony of colours, a harmony analogous to that of a musical composition.[24]

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[22] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 23.
[23] Alan Bowness, *Modern European Art*, p. 61.
[24] H. Matisse, 'Notes of a Painter, 1908' in Jack D Flam, *Matisse on Art*, p. 37.

And Kandinsky would later maintain that:

> A painter ... naturally seeks to apply the means of music to his own art, and from this results the modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical abstract constructions, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion, and so on.[25]

Mondrian, in 'Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: An Essay in Trialogue Form 1919-1920', allowed the abstract-real painter to talk of 'a similarity between abstract real painting and *modern* musical compositions which do away with melody'.[26] On the same page he speaks of 'the repose evoked by that beauty of color and tone'. Miss Marchmont's ideas, although not clearly defined, do seem to indicate a similar line of thinking, and if painting and music are linked, and music is linked to literature, as Woolf had indicated in *The Voyage Out*, then the ultimate solution is an alliance between all three arts.

If the painters felt it necessary to look for a synthesis in the arts, Woolf suggests that as a novelist she was no less certain of this importance. The party at the heart of the novel is a crucial moment in Woolf's exploration of this theme. Jacob's conversation with Mrs Durrant here concerns his lack of understanding of music. It indicates not just the barrier that words present us with, but perhaps offers some answers. When Mrs Durrant asks Jacob, 'Are you fond of music?', Jacob's response of 'I like hearing it ... I know nothing about it' (*JR* 95) is significant. The novel is in part about what people do not know about music, because the Modern quest is about the search for a way of expressing an absolute that defies expression, and as Aristotle said, 'Music as

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[25] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 40.
[26] P. Mondrian, *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: An Essay in Trialogue Form 1919-1920*, trans. M. S. James (New York: George Braziller, 1995), p. 20.

an art, however ... raises us from the average to the ideal'.[27] Understanding of this art is the key.

As she completed the novel, Woolf wrote in her diary: 'what will they say about Jacob? Mad, I suppose, a disconnected rhapsody'.[28] This musical analogy is important not just because it suggests that Woolf was thinking, however vaguely, about the possibility of applying musical form to literature, but also because it could be said to reveal a connection between Woolf's writing and Eliot's work, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' published in 1917.[29] Woolf's choice of the word 'rhapsody' is also intriguing because Eliot definitely was thinking about the specific application of musical form to poetry. There are, in fact, several ways in which these pieces of writing could be linked and it is, therefore, worth exploring the nature of this connection and its musical implications a little further. Eliot's poem presents us with a protagonist who is unable to read the characters around him. He can 'see nothing behind that child's eye',[30] and similarly, the narrator in *Jacob's Room* has trouble seeing into Jacob who has difficulty connecting with others. Randall Stevenson points out, 'the speaker [in Eliot's poem] comes closer to genuine contact - almost a kind of handshake - with the crab than with any of the people in the poem variously occluded behind doors and shutters'.[31] The image of the crab is mirrored in Woolf's work in the crab that the child Jacob, in a similarly isolated position, looks at on the beach at the beginning of the novel. Jacob is able to make physical contact with the 'opal shelled crab' (*JR* 9) and discovers, when he picks it up, that it is 'cool and light' (*JR* 9). This

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[27] Aristotle, *Politics* (1339a), in J. G. Warry, *Greek Aesthetic Theory* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 127.

[28] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, June 23rd 1922, p. 177

[29] Woolf's diaries record how Eliot visited the Woolfs in 1919. The Hogarth Press published some of his poems at the same time as they published *Kew Gardens*. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 271. The appropriation of musical terms by other art forms was not a new concept. This is true of painters such as Whistler, for instance, as I discussed earlier.

[30] T. S. Eliot, *Poems 1909 –1925* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), pp. 32 – 36, line 40. All later quotations refer to this text and line references are given in brackets after the quotation.

incident takes place immediately before he runs away from the 'enormous man and woman' (*JR* 10) lying on the beach, who 'stared up at Jacob' (*JR* 10). Contact is made with a crab, and later with a sheep's skull, but not with human beings, and at the end of the first chapter:

> The child's bucket was half full of rain water; and the opal shelled crab slowly circled round the bottom, trying with its weakly legs to climb the steep side; trying and falling back again, and trying again and again (*JR* 15).

The crab has been forgotten, but its plight seems not unlike that of the human being, trapped not just in a bucket, but in an impenetrable shell. Both pieces suggest a lack of connection, yet the musical term 'rhapsody' used in conjunction with both seems to provide integrity and unity, as if supplying an alternative to traditional expressions of human contact. There seem to be other links between the imagery in Eliot's poem and Woolf's novel. Eliot's prostitute's eye 'Twists like a crooked pin' (l.22), while Mrs Norman's memory of Jacob and the train journey, 'was completely lost in her mind, as the crooked pin dropped by a child in a wishing-well twirls in the water and disappears forever' (*JR* 33). Mrs Norman's interest in Jacob stems from her fear of being attacked by him, which originates in his standing for the sexually active male ready to take advantage of a female. Jacob's later liaison with Florinda whom he finds 'horribly brainless' (*JR* 86) is also relevant here. After they have made love, Florinda emerged from the bedroom, 'lazily stretching; yawning a little' (*JR* 86) and seeming not unlike Eliot's cat which 'flattens itself in the gutter' (l.35). The room descriptions at the end of the poem's penultimate stanza can be seen as a prelude to the room that Jacob leaves behind, the room of the novel's title.

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[31] Randall Stevenson , *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 75

Randall Stevenson draws comparisons between 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' and *Mrs Dalloway*. He draws attention to the division between the ordered, categorized, proportioned life of outwardly imposed time and the less measured areas of memory and mind-time favoured by Bergson, and he states that:

> Even writers apparently following Bergson in favouring 'time in the mind' could not ignore 'time on the clock', and indeed became - like Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* - all the more painfully aware of it because of their own antithetical position.[32]

However, the use of time in *Mrs Dalloway* had been tested in *Jacob's Room* in a way that must be connected with 'Rhapsody'. The whole structure of Eliot's poem, based as it is around the beating of the street lamp and the fragments of life that they illuminate, seems to prefigure the emphasis on rhythm and light in *Jacob's Room*. The sense of measured mechanical movement created in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' can be felt in the increasingly measured beat in the city as war approaches in Woolf's novel. Throughout her novel, Woolf draws attention to lights. There is the 'powerful oil lamp' which stands on the table in the first chapter which causes a 'harsh light' to 'cut straight across the garden' (*JR* 12). There are the lamps that burn in Cambridge and come 'accurately through each window' (*JR* 34), and the lamplight that shines through the fog of London, 'the street lamps that do not carry far enough to tell' (*JR* 86). These same lamps are bright enough to 'drench [Jacob] from head to toe' (*JR* 101) as he watches Florinda walk up Greek Street on the arm of another man. They are also the lights outside the Opera House at the end of the novel. The

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[32] Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction,* pp. 135-36. It is interesting that Stevenson should link Woolf's thinking with Bergson's ideas, because Leonard Woolf had stated in a letter to Margaret Thwaites, dated 29th March 1944, that ' The only point on which I do not agree with you is the influence of Bergson. I doubt whether Mrs Woolf had read any Bergson, and the statement in Delattre that she attended lectures in Manchester is, I think, entirely without foundation', in *The Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. F. Spotts, pp. 485-6. Yet whether or not she had direct contact with Bergson's ideas, they were there in, for instance, Eliot's work.

lights create a kind of rhythm of their own, illuminating the different aspects of Jacob's life, and rather paradoxically emphasizing the disparity and yet also the unity of these different facets, the essence of a rhapsody. These same qualities can be found in Eliot's poem. Both artists are reaching out towards a synthesis between literature and music. For both of them structure and rhythm are important in forcing connections between words and images. Here, we are getting close to a three-way unity, a kind of literary *Gesamtkunstwerk.*

Indeed, it is rhythm that helps to unite the characters in *Jacob's Room.* They are brought together in response to several kinds of music and to rhythm. However, Woolf's novel recognizes that this unity can be superficial, particularly when it is induced by a response to rhythm alone, particularly manufactured rhythm. It means that the characters form small units based on opposition to other small units: nation against nation, men against women. Woolf identified this as one of the possible outcomes of such basic, manufactured rhythms. At King's College Cambridge, the rhythmic sounding of the clock confirms Jacob's sense of the importance of the place and the people who attend it. Jacob feels that his place is as assured as the regular sounding of the clock. Similarly at St Paul's Cathedral, the 'orderly music' is comforting:

> If a book creaks, it's awful; then the order; the discipline ... Sweet and holy are the angelic choristers. And forever round the marble shoulders in and out of the folded fingers, go the thin high sounds of voice and organ. For requiem – repose (*JR* 69 - 70).

There is sound, music even, but it is 'thin'. It seems to signal death, 'requiem', because of its ability to fill the listeners with a sense of repose. Even church music, which is supposedly inspiring, has no meaning. It comes to be associated with false unity. Significantly, the voice of the church is replaced by 'the thin voice of duty' as Britain prepares for war, but ultimately this

offers nothing more substantial. The church bells and the ship's whistle have the same effect. They provide the overture to the dance of death.

The movements in the later stages of the novel are stylized and dance-like, but this is a deadly game. The 'sculptured faces' (*JR* 34), the ones identified at Cambridge, the ones that assured Jacob of security, will send their 'monolithic' (*JR* 177) son to certain and premature death. In London, the drum-beat is ever present for the crowd that flows over Waterloo Bridge, many of whom will march in 1915 to slaughter on the Somme. We could identify them with Eliot's post-war characters on London Bridge in the opening section of *The Waste Land*[33] which perhaps serves to show that nothing has changed. Woolf's image of the bridge here also seems to provoke connections with the German *Brücke* group. Their image of the bridge was taken from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and symbolized humankind's journey from absorption in decadent culture to freedom, but Woolf's use of the image treats it ironically.[34]

Throughout the later stages of *Jacob's Room* the mechanically rhythmical movements are emphasized and seem to express Woolf's distrust of unadulterated manufactured rhythms. This could be Woolf's rejection of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism. Lewis had argued with Roger Fry and Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell, in the years leading in to the war. In 1912 he had broken away from their Omega Workshop and launched what Bloomsbury considered to be vitriolic attacks on the enterprise which continued after the war.[35] Woolf's London seems rife with people marching, and we must remember Sandra Wentworth Williams noticing the power of the band, 'the royal band marching with the national flag [which] stirred wider rings of emotion, and life became something that the courageous mount and ride out to sea on' (*JR*

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[33] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* in *Poems 1909 –1925*, p. 86.
[34] Gill Perry in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, C. Harrison , F. Frascina and G. Perry (eds.), p. 66.

164). These people are not impelled by reason, but by the trumpets and drums. They are like the children who dance to the barrel organ without realizing that it sounds 'like an obscene nightingale' (*JR* 102). So people become 'blocks of tin soldiers' (*JR* 166) moved by someone or something else. Conrad's character in *The Heart of Darkness* had said, 'And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity'.[36] This is the danger for Woolf's characters, a danger Yeats had pointed out in 'Symbolism in Poetry' (1900), 'If certain sensitive persons listen persistently to the ticking of a watch, or gaze on the monotonous flashing of a light, they fall into the hypnotic trance [of the rhythm]'.[37] They are desensitized. As Woolf herself pointed out in 'Street Music', 'Rhythm alone might easily lead to excess'.[38] However, she does clarify this idea: 'but when the ear possessed its [the rhythm's] secret, tune and harmony would be united with it, and those actions which by means of rhythm were performed punctually and in time, would be done with whatever of melody is natural to each'.[39] Human beings need to understand the liberating, possibly transcendental power of music as a whole, not the deceptively attractive and alluring power of rhythm alone. None the less, the power of music is one which is so feared that we have placed structures around our experience of it. As Woolf says, 'Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery' (*JR* 73). In worrying about where to sit, the characters lose sight of the significance of the music, and of course the use of words in opera simply perpetuates this. At the end of the

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[35] I. Anscombe, *Omega and After: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 34-35.
[36] Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 106.
[37] W. B. Yeats, 'Symbolism in Poetry' in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 159.
[38] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, Volume 1, p. 31.
[39] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, Volume 1, p. 31.

novel, the characters are still going to the opera, and still failing to listen to the music carefully. They cannot connect music with words and images. If they could do this, Woolf seems to be suggesting, it would provide the answers to their questions.

Ultimately though, there are occasions when the characters do begin to interpret the sound in a perceptive way. At the beginning Mrs Flanders, thinking of her dead husband, hears the bell for the funeral service and comes to feel that it is 'Seabrook's voice - the voice of the dead' (*JR* 17). Interrupted by the voice of her son, Archer, the two sounds combine, and 'sounding at the same moment as the bell, her son's voice mixed life and death inextricably, exhilaratingly' (*JR* 17). There is the suggestion here that the experience, however fleeting, is transcendental, and that words robbed of their meaning and reduced to the status of a note in music have a much greater power. Woolf's ideas here are not unlike the Symbolists. Peter Nicholls in *Modernisms*, discussing Mallarmé, mentions:

> protracted syntactical structures ... used to create a curiously weightless language which displaces the concreteness of a particular object into a set of 'musical' relations which constitute its being-in-the-world.[40]

And Kandinsky, talking of Maeterlinck, had declared 'the word is an inner sound'.[41] He went on to assert that:

> the symbolical reference of a designated object tends to be forgotten and only the sound retained. We hear this pure sound unconsciously, perhaps, in relation to the concrete or immaterial object. But in the latter case pure sound exercises a direct impression on the soul. The soul attains to an objectless vibration ... more transcendent than the reverberations released by the sound of a bell, a stringed instrument, or a

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[40] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 35.
[41] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 34.

> fallen board. In this direction lie great possibilities for the literature of the future.[42]

This is very relevant to Woolf's work. Indeed the images of the penultimate sentence offer glimpses of the images in *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*. Through loss of the individual identity of the words, transcendence is achieved. Woolf's narrator comments during the war section, 'It seems as if we march to the sound of music; perhaps the wind and the river; perhaps these drums and trumpets - the ecstasy and hubbub of the soul' (*JR* 121); and she is in fact making a very significant point, because it is between these two kinds of rhythm that the characters must choose. Woolf champions those who cannot be subjected to the rules of society. The rhythms of the natural world lead to 'the ecstasy of the soul'. She is sceptical of those who choose the route of social conformity. The natural rhythms must be experienced even if their rather Dionysian qualities are frightening, for the 'drums and trumpets' of the social world lead to the 'hubbub of the soul.' This is the force of Apollo taken to extremes. The Apolline desire for order outlined in Jacob's Classical dream must be rejected. It only tells half the story.

Yet Jacob's enthusiasm for Classicism is not necessarily the problem. In this novel, Woolf has looked carefully at what the arts can learn from each other in order to communicate more effectively. She has explored the use of pattern, decoration and design in her use of imagery; she has examined the possibility of musical analogies. Ultimately, Woolf is looking at the possibility of one art appropriating the techniques of another to form a 'total artwork'. Thus, it is Jacob's lack of understanding of music and Modern painting that is the real problem. This places him firmly in the nineteenth-century world and this is why Jacob must die in the Great War, for Woolf would state in 'The Leaning Tower' (1940) that the start of this war represent the end of

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[42] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* p. 34.

nineteenth-century values.[43] Jacob's failure to survive the war is an indication of his inability to move into the Modern world. His affinity with Classicism as we have seen is triggered by his experiences at Cambridge. Subsequently, when he moves to London, Jacob enters a world which is more conscious of the arts. Thus we have visits to the opera, parties where music becomes the topic of conversation, the chance meeting with Miss Marchmont and Jacob's association with Fanny Elmer and the artist, Bramham. It is in London that Jacob has the opportunity to familiarize himself with the works of Wagner. There is reference made to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (*JR* 72), and yet Jacob never really gets beyond the inquiry stage about 'This fellow Wagner' (*JR* 75) in his discussions with Bonamy. Similarly, he is 'quite unmoved' (*JR* 113) by the actions of Miss Marchmont and rejects Modern painting as the 'least respectable of the arts' (*JR* 131), only acknowledging the ability of the French. All these things would have provided Jacob with the means to learn to re-define his Classical aesthetics in such a way as to fit them for the Modern world, yet Jacob ignores the opportunities. In this novel, in which Woolf is clearly exploring the importance of what one art can gain from another, such ignorance is literally fatal. It is important to note that it is while watching a performance of *Tristan* that 'Clara Durrant said farewell to Jacob Flanders, and tasted the sweetness of death in effigy' (*JR* 73) because in part Woolf is hinting that Jacob's failure to understand or take serious notice of such operas and subsequent movements in art is one of the keys to the failure of his Classical ideas to survive and this prefaces his death. For Jacob, Classicism represents Apolline order; he has missed the Dionysiac side of the equation. So Jacob, disillusioned by his Classical dream, is subsumed by the Dionysiac world of war which will cause his death. His downfall is endemic in the fact that he couldn't link these too important extremes. Woolf is of course beginning, in this novel, to examine the division between Apollo and

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[43] Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower' in *A Woman's Essays* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 164.

Dionysus, which was to be of far more importance in her fourth novel, *Mrs Dalloway*. *Jacob's Room* makes tentative steps along this rather tricky road of discovery. In *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf takes a much more profound look at the nature of this issue.

## Chapter 4: The Forces of Apollo and Dionysus and the Question of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in *Mrs Dalloway*

While *Mrs Dalloway* continues to explore the possibilities of what could be achieved through combinations of the arts, it also adds to the complexity of the issue. Two things are central to the exploration in this novel: Clarissa Dalloway's party and the reader's understanding of Septimus Smith's aesthetic stance. Combinations of the arts provide the key to understanding of both these areas. The roots of this analysis lie in the writings of Wagner, but the Nietzschean interpretation of these ideas found in *The Birth of Tragedy* is also important; the ideas behind the arts are in this novel quite as crucial as the images drawn from them.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Woolf ever read Nietzsche's work influential Bloomsbury figures did have knowledge of his thinking.[1] Therefore, it seems likely that Woolf would have been aware of Nietzsche's ideas without necessarily reading his works, for Nietzsche's thinking was something of which European *avant-garde* artists of all genres would have been aware. In *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, Gill Perry, discussing primitivism in the works of the Fauves in France says that attitudes of the group may have owed something to 'the cult of Nietzsche, which had already spread to France by the late 1890s'.[2] She points out that 1898 had seen the translation of the complete works by Henri Albert and notes the appeal of this to French intellectuals and writers. Derain and Vlaminck knew Nietzsche's works well, so did André Gide. All of these people had connections with Bloomsbury during the Post-Impressionist exhibitions

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[1] Roger Fry states in a letter to Sir Claude Phillips written on 17th November 1915, 'P.S. I must tell you re the *German General Staff* that I only found the quotation from Nietzsche afterwards but was so struck with the coincidence that I couldn't avoid putting it in'. Roger Fry: *The Collected Letters* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), Volume 3, p. 391.

[2] G. Perry in C. Harrison, F. Frascina, G. Perry (eds.), *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, pp. 48-49.

period.[3] Stan Smith asserts that Nietzsche's work 'provides the key to the locked rooms of *The Waste Land*',[4] which again suggests that those close to Bloomsbury were aware of this philosophy. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was influential in the formation of the ideas of the *Brücke* group in the early twentieth-century,[5] using Nietzsche's ideas to examine modern culture. Nietzsche was advocating that man should try to overcome the conditioning of the modern world by seeking out alternative forms of expression and meaning, naming the man who overcame these forces the Übermensch. *Die Brücke* took their name from a central image in this work where, as mentioned earlier, the bridge represents the movement from absorption in a decadent culture to freedom. It will be clear now how relevant these ideas are to *Mrs Dalloway*, and there are further possible connections between Woolf's work and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

It is important to note that Nietzsche called this work *The Birth of Tragedy* <u>*Out of the Spirit of Music*</u>.[6] Here he outlines several ideas that were of importance in European thinking, and although fifteen years later Nietzsche was to criticize his early ideas, in combination with the ideas of Schopenhauer and Wagner they did make a profound and lasting impact on the interpretation of culture. As far as Woolf is concerned, I think it is important to look again, and in more detail, at the early essay 'Street Music'.[7] It is arguable that the ideas Woolf outlines here hint at their writer's understanding of Nietzschean thinking, for certainly 'Street Music' reads like an interpretation of ideas outlined in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and analysis of this essay,

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[3] Richard Shone in *Bloomsbury Portraits*, p. 166, records that Vlaminck's work was shown at the Omega Workshops during 1918. He outlines possible first connections between André Gide and the Bloomsbury artists in 1912 –13, p. 119, and then in connection with the Diaghilev ballet after the war, p. 181. Woolf mentions Gide in her letters / diaries. Derain was also associated with Bloomsbury through the ballet as Shone records, pp. 187-8.

[4] Stan Smith, *The Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal* (Hertfordshire, London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p.129.

[5] G. Perry in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, pp. 65-6.

[6] My underlining.

[7] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 28.

important for an understanding of *Jacob's Room*, is even more relevant when considering *Mrs Dalloway*.

Nietzsche states in the opening sentences of *The Birth of Tragedy* that:

> We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*; just as the reproduction of the species depends on the duality of the sexes, with its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliations.[8]

The idea of duality outlined here was to be a pivotal point in much Modern thinking, especially in the work of the Expressionists.[9] Nietzsche goes on to explain further the nature of these two forces, aligning the Apolline force with sculpture and the visual arts, and the Dionysiac force with music. He constructs an argument asserting that, although related, they are 'in violent opposition'.[10] He states that this struggle is 'only apparently bridged by the word "art"',[11] ultimately in Attic tragedy. So Nietzschean thinking in *The Birth of Tragedy* centres on the idea that Attic tragedy relied on the creation of a state of equilibrium between two forces for effect. Nietzsche implies that tragedies such as *Hamlet* have moved away from the creation of this state because of their loss of the chorus, for Attic tragedy relied on sound, music, movement and spectacle, and the chorus was a vital instrument in this combination, providing the musical connection. The omission of the chorus from plays such as *Hamlet* removes the musical quality from the work, therefore according to Nietzsche, reducing its impact on the audience.

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[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, translated by Susan Whiteside ed. M. Tanner (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 14.
[9] Thomas Harrison in *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance*, outlines the significance of duality.
[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 14.
[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 14. An interesting link could be made with Woolf's essay 'The Narrow Bridge of Art'.

In relation to Woolf's essay, one of the most interesting connections must lie in Nietzsche's further elaboration on the characteristics of these Apolline and Dionysiac traits. While the Apolline tendency founds itself in the world of dreams and illusion through which, according to Nietzsche, every man is an artist, the Dionysiac tendency is related to intoxication and dance through which mankind becomes the work of art. Apollo was the 'soothsaying' god, the ultimate motivation of whom is individuation;[12] Dionysus was the god of the vine, revelling in dance occasioned by intoxication and whose ultimate urge is to unite through 'a complete forgetting of the self' (p. 17). 'Street Music', while not expressing exactly the same ideas, does seem to owe a debt to Nietzschean thinking as, in outlining the position of the street musician in English society, Woolf recognizes that public thinking regards the occupation of musician as even less respectable than that of the painter or writer:

> For if the stringing together of words which nevertheless may convey some useful information to the mind, or the laying on of colours which may represent some tangible object, are employments which can be but tolerated at best, how are we to regard the man who spends his time making tunes?[13]

This seems to acknowledge the Apolline - Dionysiac split, a suggestion which is compounded by the fact that the musician is said to be 'the minister of the wildest of all the gods, who has not yet learnt to speak with human voice'. Woolf describes an old man 'with eyes shut so that he might better perceive the melodies of his soul',[14] and says that he 'literally played himself from Kensington to Knightsbridge in a trance of musical ecstasy'. Woolf, like Nietzsche, attributes this power to a god, a pagan god who was exiled when

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[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, pp. 16-17.
[13] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 29.
[14] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, pp. 28-29. The next six references are from the same pages.

'the first Christian altars rose.' She also states, 'I should be inclined to ascribe some such divine origin to musicians at any rate.' Woolf perceives a similar duality between the ordered civilized life which Nietzsche associated with the Apolline and the less civilized more overtly barbaric qualities of the Dionysiac. She associates 'the householder at his legitimate employment' and the Dionysiac street musician who disturbs him. She states, 'we have trained ourselves to such a perfection of civilization that expression of any kind has something almost indecent - certainly irreticent - about it.' Woolf notes society's suspicion and desire to tame and civilize anyone who seems to be 'possessed by a spirit which the ordinary person cannot understand'. She uses words such as 'potent' to describe the nature of the spirit and describes how the spirit forces the musician to follow, which adds to the connection with intoxication. This also seems to be linked to the compulsion to join in the dance which Nietzsche suggests is a fundamental quality of the Dionysiac tendency. The opposition between order and disorder is made clear in Woolf's work:

> It is because music incites within us something that is wild and inhuman like itself - a spirit that we would willingly stamp out and forget - that we are distrustful of musicians and loath to put ourselves under their power.[15]

To be civilized means discipline and 'to have taken the measure of our own capabilities', a suggestion that hints at individuation; to be civilized means minimizing the impact of the music.[16] This seems to link with Nietzsche's image of 'the figure of Apollo [rising] up in all its pride and [holding] out the Gorgon's head to the grotesque, barbaric Dionysiac, the most dangerous force it had to contend with. It was in Doric art that Apollo's majestically

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[15] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 29.
[16] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 29.

repudiating stance was immortalized'.[17] Woolf also identifies music with madness associated with a barbarism when she states:

> When the pagan gods come back the god we have never worshipped will have his revenge upon us. It will be the god of music who will breathe madness into our brains, cracking the walls of our temples, and driving us in loathing of our rhythmless lives to dance and circle for ever in obedience to his voice.[18]

However, Woolf's ideas do not always echo Nietzsche's. There is a departure when she begins to think about the nature of music. Nietzsche had stated:

> Music was apparently already known as an Apolline art, but only because of the rhythm, as regular as the sound of waves crashing against the shore, the creative power of which was developed for the representation of Apolline states. [19]

Woolf, however, considered that it was the neglect of rhythm (not the mechanical rhythm attacked in *Jacob's Room* but something more fundamental to human nature) that had led human kind into its present state, 'The safest and easiest attribute of music - its tune - is taught, but rhythm which is its soul, is allowed to escape'.[20] However, the ideas do seem to converge on one further point. Woolf qualifies her ideas on rhythm by suggesting that what is needed is not only attention to the rhythm (her novels all suggest that over attention to the rhythm can lead to insensitivity which would perhaps tie in with Nietzsche's equation of rhythm with the Apolline

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[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 19.
[18] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 30.
[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 2.
[20] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 30.

force), [21] but an awareness that the tune and the rhythm are linked. In other words an awareness of union. This seems to move Woolf closer to Nietzsche again. An awareness of union, she feels is available to 'the uneducated, whose sense of rhythm has never been divorced or made subsidiary to their sense of tune',[22] the street musician. Nietzsche considers that 'care was taken to ensure that the one element held to be non-Apolline was excluded, the very element of which Dionysiac music consisted - the overwhelming power of sound, the unified flow of melody and the utterly incomparable world of harmony'.[23] Early on in her essay, Woolf mentions the street musician's need to possess the music. She says, 'I have seen violinists who were obviously using their instrument to express something in their own hearts as they swayed by the curb in Fleet Street',[24] while Nietzsche says, 'In the Dionysiac dithyramb man's symbolic faculties are roused to their supreme intensity: a feeling never before experienced is struggling for expression'.[25] Similarly, Woolf is able to state:

> In spite of all we have done to repress music it has a power over us still whenever we give ourselves up to its sway that no picture, however fair, or words however stately, can approach. The strange sight of a room full of civilized people moving in rhythmic motion at the command of a band of musicians is one to which we have grown accustomed, but it may be that some day it will suggest the vast possibilities that lie within the power of rhythm, and the whole of life will be revolutionized as it was when man first realized the power of steam.[26]

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[21] This can be seen in *Jacob's Room* where the rhythm is associated with the soporific drums of war and in Susan's over adherence to rhythm in *The Waves*. It can also be seen in the rejection of the waltz rhythm in *The Years*.
[22] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 30.
[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, pp. 20-21.
[24] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 28.
[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 21.
[26] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, pp. 30-31.

And Nietzsche, looking at the search for a symbol to express the nature of the Dionysiac, says that it requires 'a new world of symbols'.[27] The ancients, he asserts, needed to be able to express the 'whole of the symbolism of the body'. This was achieved through the symbol of the dance, 'Then all the other symbolic forces, the forces of music - rhythm, dynamics and harmony - would suddenly find impetuous expression'.[28] Woolf's use of the dance symbol is extensive in 'Street Music' and, as we have seen, in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, and provokes further connections with Nietzsche. The closeness of some of these ideas suggests the influence of Nietzsche's thinking on *Mrs Dalloway*. This is apparent in a number of ways.

First, the exploration of what Nietzsche called the Apolline and Dionysiac tendencies has an obvious relevance for the very conception of *Mrs Dalloway*. In her diary, Woolf makes clear her intention of using opposites in the much quoted statement, 'I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side'.[29] It could be said that the 'sane' are the equivalent of those who subscribe to Apolline tendencies and the 'insane' are those swayed by Dionysiac tendencies, although that is to simplify the issue. Woolf made it clear that she intended Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith to be seen as equally important. It is, therefore, easy to see Clarissa as the sane character, dominated by Apolline characteristics, and Septimus as her antithetical insane, Dionysiac counterpart, whose experience has led these qualities to dominate. This is supported by the fact that Clarissa is very closely associated with the civilized world of words and images. She is a society hostess preparing, on the day on which the novel is set, for a party

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[27] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 21. The next reference is from the same page.
[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 21.
[29] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 208.

which will allow her to present further images to the world and where words will predominate.

It is, of course, the social event of Clarissa's party that provides the structure for the novel and that affords the forum for a point of connection between Septimus and herself. In spite of the fact that the novel is set on one day in June during Clarissa's middle age, her route to this position is carefully charted in the novel. In her youth Clarissa had to choose between marriage to Peter Walsh whom she loved and who was associated with Wagner, the creator of the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Richard Dalloway who was the right society choice. Clarissa opted for Dalloway, the ultimate in an upper class interpretation of civilization, now living surrounded by characters, such as Hugh Whitbread, who provide even more extreme versions of Apolline reserve; the sane world of parties and politics, but with no provision for a Dionysiac element. The creation of the shell-shock victim, Septimus Warren Smith, allows Woolf to look at a world apart from this civilization. Septimus has an extreme sensitivity to sound, and not just to the rhythm of the clocks. It is relatively easy to suggest ways in which Clarissa and Septimus represent these two different forces. However, to say that each represents only that side of the issue would be a gross over-simplification, for in both Clarissa and Septimus, this is just a tendency; neither character has an exclusive command of either characteristic, a fact that hints at Woolf's mistrust of terms such as 'sane' and 'insane'. An important point in the novel is the understanding that each character has of the less dominant tendency. Clarissa experiences moments of almost Dionysiac ecstasy such as when she recognizes her engagement with the London day:

> (... Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she adored all that) (*MD* 8).

The fact that this section is in parenthesis seems to indicate that such moments are removed from or repressed by Clarissa's habitual mode of existence. References to the dance and to vibrant movement suggest an understanding of the Dionysiac qualities while the movement of language suggests an engagement with the rhythms of life that goes beyond a simple acceptance of the rhythm of clocks. Yet in spite of this understanding, music, which might provide the possibility, however muted, of expression through dance, is excluded from Clarissa's party; every opportunity for Dionysiac expression is eliminated from this world. We do learn, however, that Clarissa experienced the pull of the Dionysiac force quite powerfully in her youth through her relationship with Sally Seton, but rejected it and has allowed the Apolline to dominate, as will be looked at later. Similarly, Septimus has aspired to the world of Apolline order, but the war forces him to recognize its emptiness: this society with its extremes of Apolline order has paradoxically consigned him, through war, to a world of disorder, where Dionysian characteristics take over unchecked. Just as for Clarissa much of the sense of Dionysiac ecstasy is entangled in a sense of loss of the self, so Septimus is conscious of the civilized world that exists around him and of the important message that he, 'the lord of men' (*MD* 61), must impart to them. This world fails to comprehend his vision and he is dismissed as having lost his sense of proportion; yet it was the civilized world that sent him to war. Considered together, Clarissa, with her tendency to be associated with the visual and literary arts, and Septimus, with his tendency to the aural arts, provide a further forum for Woolf to explore the possibility of combinations of the arts while also examining how the arts have been betrayed and yet also sustained by the priorities of a bourgeois society that values civilized appearance on the one hand while condoning violence on the other. This paradox is one of her main focuses.

Woolf seems to be suggesting that what is required is a balance between the two, an equilibrium. Nietzsche's ideas offer a starting point for this analysis.

While Clarissa and her preparations for the party arguably provide the framework for the novel, it is important to look at Septimus first. I have noted that for Septimus, the pre-war years are ones firmly based in the Apolline world of dreams and illusions. Exploring Septimus's understanding of the power of words, Woolf's novel tells us that before the war Septimus, like Leonard Bast in Forster's *Howard's End* who, significantly, is killed by a cascade of books, was keen to improve himself. The world, at the unique moment that Septimus arrived in London, seemed to offer untold possibilities for the working-class man. These depended on an examination of the power of words. Septimus is offered the opportunity to go to Miss Isabel Pole's lectures, and infatuated by her he learns a little of literature. Isabel Pole fuels Septimus's dreams, as she tells him that he is like Keats and aims to make him enjoy *Anthony and Cleopatra*.[30] Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, draws attention to the fact that:

> By 1914, it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but vigorously literary, for the Great War occurred at a special historical moment when two 'liberal' forces were powerfully coinciding in England. On the one hand, the belief in the educative powers of classical and English Literature was still extremely strong. On the other, the appeal of popular education and 'self-improvement' was at its peak, and such education was still conceived in largely humanistic terms.[31]

While it would be impossible to call Septimus 'vigorously literary', the fact that Woolf chooses to include information on his attempts at 'self-

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[30] Here, Woolf was exploring something that she had experienced. She had given lectures to working women. Mitchell Laeska in *Granite and Rainbow*, pp. 107-9, records how Woolf accepted 'a teaching post at Morley College, an evening institute in South London for working people', p. 107. She spoke to them about books and the arts.

[31] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 157.

improvement' aided by the bourgeois forces of Isabel Pole indulging her own romanticizing of the self-educated poet and the heroic soldier, and the fact that this involves initiation into the aesthetic field of words, is surely significant. It seems to demonstrate the Pygmalion-like attempts of the bourgeois to subsume the working classes into their cultural epoch without offering them the advantage of their own financial security.[32]

However, Septimus has also been subject to another bourgeois force based on the Apolline world of dreams, which might offer him economic stability. He worked in the commercial world. This world subjected him to another pressure and to another set of words and images. Before the war Septimus was encouraged to take up football by his employer, Mr Brewer, who suspected that knowledge of literature was commercially unsound. This, Brewer feels, will turn his employee, who could 'in ten or fifteen years, succeed him to the leather chair' (*MD* 77), into a man. Ultimately, Mr Brewer's desires are achieved, not through football, but through the more dangerous 'game' of war. Both football and war could be said to be motivated by Dionysiac sentiment because both involve the subsuming of individuals into one unit, like the Dionysiac link with the dance, although football does have the balancing factor of rules of order which war does not. The war, while initially having the effect Brewer desires, ultimately allows Septimus to recognize the illusions of his pre-war world. Woolf makes Septimus's reasons for fighting clear, 'He went to fight to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in the square' (*MD* 77). Brewer's world is only a small part of this; for Septimus, the cultural Apolline dream world is already more important than the order of commerce, perhaps because it is controlled by a more affluent and influential group. Woolf, describing the devastating consequences of war is also keen to

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[32] It is perhaps worth noting the interest in the Pygmalion story which can be found in the arts of the Aesthetic movement.

point out, although rather euphemistically, that the war had a more damaging effect on the petit-bourgeois world of Brewer than on the bourgeois world of the Dalloways. She states that it 'threw out many of Mr Brewer's calculations'; then she states more incisively that 'eventually, so prying and so insidious were the fingers of the European War, that [they] smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves at Mr Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill' (*MD* 77). Woolf's combination of imagery is interesting here because it indicates the pretensions of the petit bourgeois such as Brewer and mocks their aspirations. The war impinged on lower middle-class life in a profound way; it marked the death of a way of life. However, the lives of the Dalloways and those in their class are not unmarked by the war, which exposed not just the vulnerability of their assumed superiority but also the hypocrisy of their cultural and political bulwarks. It is this knowledge that destroys Septimus's illusions and provokes within him a feeling of negation which is so characteristic of the feelings of many *avant-garde* art movements such as Expressionism and ultimately Dada and Surrealism which were influenced by Nietzschean thinking. Yet Septimus, his understanding of the arts limited by Miss Pole's vague romanticism, in rejecting the bourgeois world has no way in to such kinds of expression, though paradoxically he is attuned to them by temperament.

During the war, Septimus behaved in a way that was much admired by all factions of the bourgeois world. He 'was one of the first the volunteer' (*MD* 77), fought, as we have noted, 'to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in the square' (*MD* 77), 'developed manliness' (*MD* 77), 'was promoted' (*MD* 77) and 'drew the attention ... of his officer Evans' (*MD* 77). He even manages to endure Evans's death in a 'manly' way, without feeling. As the narrator says, 'He had gone through the whole show ... was still under thirty and was bound

to survive' (*MD* 78). The use of the word 'show' is significant here, because it gives the whole idea of war an illusory quality as if it is simply a theatrical performance or a game. Ironically, it supports the idea of an Apolline link because Nietzsche's theory places the Apolline tendency in the realms of illusion. Indeed, the end product of war for Septimus is paradoxically Apolline individuation as he initially congratulates himself on his own survival and strength of character and he is congratulated by others for his heroism. In the petit bourgeois world of the office, 'they advanced him to a post of considerable responsibility. They were proud of him; he had won crosses' (*MD* 79). However, the evaluation of his war time experiences gradually exposes within Septimus a growing sense that he cannot feel which leads him to the initially devastating conclusion (since romanticism, as offered to him, was entirely based on feeling) that perhaps 'the world itself is without meaning' (*MD* 79). This revelation is linked by Woolf to Septimus's reading of Shakespeare and his sense that the 'boy's business of intoxication of language ... had shrivelled utterly' (*MD* 79). It is this re-evaluation of Shakespeare's work that is important for Woolf's aesthetic depiction of Septimus. Isabel Pole had initiated Septimus into the world of nineteenth-century romanticism, which after the war provides no means of expressing the devastating impact of that experience. Post-war Septimus feels that the instruments of pre-war and wartime deception were words: the narrator notes, 'How Shakespeare loathed humanity ... This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair' (*MD* 79). Words have disguised the fact that human beings are incapable of feeling 'lasting emotions' (*MD* 80). They 'have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment' (*MD* 80). The war has made Septimus think that all words and images of the pre-war world were faithless and imprecise, that words, rather than the use of words, are in themselves without value.

It is important to note that during the war the words used to describe sport were transformed by bourgeois society into the metaphors and euphemisms for fighting which dominated propaganda literature and posters. The macabre insinuations of these media were only fully understood with hindsight.[33] Septimus has been fooled by propaganda but he has seen through this deception and ultimately the knowledge of deception is the most devastating thing. Woolf was aware of the tremendous propaganda machine that had become so much a part of the war. Just before the end of the war, on October 12th 1918, she wrote in her diary:

> The Northcliffe papers do all they can to insist upon the indispensability & delight of war. They magnify our victories to make our mouths water for more; they shout with joy when the Germans sink the Irish mail; but they do also show some signs that Wilson's terms may be accepted.[34]

There had been angry Commons debates on propaganda during August 1918 with members calling for the propaganda bodies to be disbanded after the armistice.[35] The function of propagandists during the early years of the war had been to persuade people to enlist. Aided by the power of words and images of the bourgeois world, the government produced 2.5 million copies of 110 different posters aimed at making people believe that it was right to

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[33] There are rather macabre stories of football and cricket being used to inspire the troops at the front. Again, Fussell provides some interesting comments: 'One way of showing the sporting spirit was to kick a football towards the enemy lines while attacking. This feat was first performed by the First Battalion of the 18th London Regiment at Loos in 1915', Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 27. He goes on to describe one of the most famous episodes, involving a Captain W. P. Nevill who was a company commander with the 8th East Surreys. While on leave in London before the battle of the Somme, Nevill bought four footballs. He offered a prize for the platoon which, at the commencement of the battle, could kick the football up to the German front line. In this way an almost surreal atmosphere was created at the front which was compounded by the fact that there were many reminders of London pre-war life such as the buses, brewers vans and removal vans which were used to move troops and provisions. Paul Fussell, p. 65.

[34] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 200.

[35] Gerard J. DeGroot, in *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 176, states that a fear of propaganda in peace time was growing.

fight.[36] We must remember that Septimus was one of the first to enlist. Recruitment poems such as Jessie Pope's 'Who's for the Game?' made use of game imagery. It is, therefore, really no surprise that when in the post-war world Holmes suggests cricket, Woolf ensures that Septimus is sceptical. The notion of a team, central to the philosophies of all bourgeois factions, is an illusion when in Septimus's view such human beings are basically ruled by the Apolline force of individuation and are therefore selfish.

In the post-war world, where Septimus sees through the hollowness of words, images of all kinds of bourgeois security, which had formed part of his pre-war dream, have been transformed into the nightmarish images of Brewer, 'all coldness and clamminess within, - his geraniums ruined in the War – his cook's nerves destroyed', of 'Amelia Whatshername, handing cups of tea ... - a leering, sneering, obscene little harpy', and of 'Toms and Berties in their starched shirt fronts oozing drops of vice' (*MD* 80). It is important to note that Septimus keeps a book in which he writes down his thoughts and this book also contains Dionysiac drawings of these characters, 'naked at their antics' (*MD* 80). For him this is a calculated attempt to strip away the Apolline illusions of bourgeois superiority. It is also important to note that when the structured words of bourgeois society have failed him, Septimus turns to pictures and automatic writing which seems to link him to the Expressionists and Dadaists, art movements of the pre-war and war years. Woolf seems to be using Septimus to explore the Nietzschean values of these movements and to explore further the implications of combinations of different art forms. She is also depicting his fight for a mode of expression which will communicate and the

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[36] Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 176 - 9. The case had been taken up by the press barons who were not under the auspices of the government. Later in the war the government were forced to try to control the propaganda that proliferated in order to counteract pacifist tracts. From August 1917, Sir Edward Carson headed both the Department for Information and the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) and this culminated in a £240,000 treasury grant in November of that year which was the largest investment of state funds in propaganda. The main problem for the NWAC was that it encountered anger from working class people, who resented the middle classes trying to persuade them to fight in a war that they perceived to be based on bourgeois principles.

lack of understanding he encounters, which provide another link with these art movements. I want to explore the nature of these connections now.

First, it is important to look at the images that Septimus has of himself, because these suggest connections with Expressionism. While Woolf writes very little about the Expressionist movement, there is evidence to suggest that she was well aware of its existence.[37] One major element of pre-war

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[37] Although Desmond MacCarthy visited Germany when he and Fry were looking for paintings for the 1910 exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists,* as stated in Stansky's, *On or About December 1910 - Early Bloomsbury and its Intimate World*, pp. 177-183, there were no German pictures in the exhibition. However, during the years leading up to the war, German art was shown in English exhibitions. A number of the paintings of Kandinsky, a Russian working in Germany, were exhibited at the 1912 *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* as part of the Russian group, while much more coverage was given to the group by Frank Rutter's *Post-Impressionists and Futurists Exhibition* which was staged in 1913 at the Leeds Art Club before it transferred to the Doré Galleries in New Bond Street, in London. An account of this is given in Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), p. 105. For this exhibition Rutter was heavily reliant on the collector Michael Sadler who had bought a number of German paintings including work by Kandinsky and Franz Marc. While these facts will not prove that Woolf herself had seen the paintings and was familiar with German Expressionism it does suggest that in the years leading up to the war, German and eastern European art was beginning to make an impact in England. As the sister of Vanessa Bell, sister-in-law of Clive Bell, friend of Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy, it seems probable that Woolf may at least have had some understanding of the power of the Expressionist movement. This probability is compounded by the fact that during the war Sadler told Kandinsky that there was a growing interest in his paintings, Mark Gertler being a new convert. Woolf knew Gertler. In June 1918 she noted of an early meeting with him, 'His [Gertler's] mind certainly has a powerful spring to it. He is also evidently an immense egoist. He means by sheer will to conquer art,' in *Diaries*, Volume 1, pp. 158-9. Woolf was also familiar with his work. She notes rather wryly, in July 1918, 'I was taken to Gertler's studio & shown his solid "unrelenting" teapot' and also records Gertler's desire 'to paint form in the brightest colours.' (Virginia Woolf, *Diaries*, Volume 1, 29th July 1918, pp. 175-6.) Although her subsequent comments hint that Gertler's art was not ultimately Expressionist, they are interesting because they suggest that Woolf was interested in or at least familiar with the ideas of Expressionism. She concludes the diary entry of Monday 29th July 1918 by saying of Gertler: 'Ever since he was a child the solidity & shapes of objects have tortured him. I advised him, for arts [sic] sake, to keep sane ... But he can think pianola music equal to hand made, since it shows the form, & the touch & the expression are nothing.' (Virginia Woolf, *Diaries*, Volume 1, p. 176.) The implied criticism of Gertler seems to suggest that to Woolf expression was important. Another fact that suggests that Woolf was at least conscious of the Expressionists is the connection which she had with the Omega Workshops through Vanessa Bell. Nina Hamnett, who worked with Fry, Grant and Bell at the Omega Workshops, was married to the Norwegian Roald Kristian. J. Collins, in *The Omega Workshops*, suggests that Kristian had a knowledge of European artistic developments including, specifically, the work of Franz Marc. She states, 'His two rug designs and his wood cut of three horses gambolling in a field, reproduced in the 1918 Omega Works' book, *Original Woodcuts by Various Artists*, seem to indicate knowledge of the work of Franz Marc ... Nina Hamnett reported that Kristian spoke fluent German when she met him in Paris in 1914, p. 109. She goes on to surmise that he may have spent some time in Germany, possibly in Munich, although she can offer no proof for such an assertion. However, Collins draws attention to the fact that Hamnett herself shows some awareness of German art, by including in a still life painted between 1912 and 1914 a copy of *Der Sturm* produced by the Berlin Expressionist group, p. 110. Collins suggests that it is conceivable that Hamnett may have met its editor, Herwath Walden, who was in Paris in 1913 to collect paintings

Expressionism that seems to have particular relevance to the post-war world of *Mrs Dalloway* is the image of a single man, an outcast, facing the impending total devastation of the world, a kind of Armageddon. This is in fact the sense we have when we first meet Septimus as he stares at the car carrying the dignitary at the beginning of the novel. This car contains a person who could be a monarch and people 'seemed ready to attend their Sovereign ... to the cannon's mouth' (*MD* 18), yet Septimus seems terrified by 'this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre ... as if some horror had come almost to the surface' (*MD* 15). Of the outbreak of war, the Expressionist painter Grosz wrote, '[it] made it clear to me that the masses marching wildly cheering through the streets were without a will under the influence of the press and military pomp. The will of the statesmen and the generals dominated them'.[38] This was Grosz's feeling as a German; however, the feeling in Britain was much the same. It is known that Woolf was deeply suspicious of the patriotic fervour that typified the early years of the war. A diary entry of early 1915 notes:

> We went to a concert at the Queen's Hall ... Considering that my ears have been free of music for some weeks, I think patriotism is a base emotion. By this I mean ... that they played a national Anthem and a hymn & all I could feel was the entire absence of emotion in myself & everyone else.[39]

This same entry expresses a dislike for the human race. Woolf also felt that people were moving without thought. It is Septimus's post-war realization that patriotism equals servitude. Nicholls in *Modernisms* states that Expressionists were characterized by 'their generally shared view of modernity as a condition

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for his Erster Deutsche Herbstsalon. Woolf's letters to Fry and Vanessa Bell show that she was aware of Omega. There is not necessarily a direct connection between the paintings of Expressionist groups and Woolf's work, but it is possible to see parallels which suggest minds responding in the same way to the world.

[38] From Grosz and W. Herzfelde, 'Die Kunst ist in Gefahr' in Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, pp. 100-101.

[39] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, Sunday 3 January 1915, p5.

of servitude from which humanity must break free',[40] and Woolf suggests that Septimus comes to see himself as a free man. His final act of servitude, motivated by the dream of fitting into bourgeois society, was to marry Rezia.[41] When he decides 'their marriage was over' (*MD* 61), he feels simultaneously, that 'it was decreed that he ... the lord of men, should be free' (*MD* 61). What Septimus has done is to remove himself from the Apolline world and he is trying to give voice to what Nietzsche called in *The Birth of Tragedy*, 'supernatural sounds', which Nietzsche says makes Dionysiac man feel 'like a god'.[42]

Expressionists also depicted a Nietzschean battle between individual and society for the control of the soul, as is arguably embodied in the work of the Berlin artist Ludwig Meidner. His *Apocalyptic Landscape* of 1913, which depicts a naked man in the foreground with the world behind him attacked by the menacing storm clouds, seems particularly prophetic of the post-war man, Septimus. The motivation behind Meidner's work was a sense of horror at the ever-escalating city life.[43] *Mrs Dalloway* is set in a London that teems with people mixed in a similar urban frenzy, a suggestion that the war has changed nothing. Such scenes, interpreted through the Apolline mind of Clarissa Dalloway, evoke a feeling of invigoration, and yet it is through Septimus, whose reaction arguably owes something to Expressionist ideas, that they achieve a heightened vividness. Septimus in the park and later at home becomes 'like a drowned sailor on a rock' (*MD* 62) and 'this last relic ... this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions' (*MD* 83). He feels he has the message that the world is looking for. Another Expressionist painting, this time by Oskar Kokoschka, *Knight Errant*, painted in 1915, depicts a knight in a magical landscape. Although the knight, who is stretched out on the seabed,

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[40] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p.142.
[41] It is important to note that for Clarissa marriage means the acceptance of the bourgeois values.
[42] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 18.

wears medieval armour and cannot really be closely connected with the war that raged at the time, in its apocalyptic, visionary way, it seems related to that event. Death is expected and is signalled in the painting by the image of a bird with a human head which flies above the sea. The seas are tempestuous, and the knight seems destined to die.[44] The painting's imagery interestingly anticipates the images Woolf uses in connection with Septimus's visions of death. As Rezia and Septimus evaluate their experiences of Dr Holmes, and Septimus contemplates suicide, Septimus's vision of himself is as 'this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world' (*MD* 83). Later, Rezia remembers: 'He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea' (*MD* 125). Such visions of death provoke equally profound connections with the Dada movement.

Dawn Ades in *Modern Art* states that Dada was:

> essentially a state of mind, focused by the war from discontent into disgust. This disgust was directed at the society responsible for the terrifying waste of that war, and at the art and philosophy which appeared so enmeshed with bourgeois rationalism that they were incapable of giving birth to new forms through which any kind of protest could be made.[45]

In a different essay she notes that, 'This state of mind was already endemic in Europe before the war, but the war gave a new point of urgency to the dissatisfaction'.[46] Septimus's mental state has resulted directly from experiences in the Great War, a war that, as has already been noted, he was

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[43] Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, p. 13. Cork outlines clearly the sense of horror felt by artists in Berlin as the city continued to expand at an alarming rate.
[44] Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, pp. 83-84.
[45] Quoted by Bernard Denvir in *Modern Art: Impressionism to Post-Modernism*, edited by David Britt (London: Guild Publishing, 1989), p. 210.

sent to as a result of the deceptions of bourgeois values and culture, and Ades notes that Huelsenbeck wrote in 1920, 'We were agreed that the war had been contrived by various governments for the most autocratic, sordid and materialistic reasons'.[47] This is Septimus's evaluation of the war. Equally, for the Dadaists as for Septimus, the war was a demonstration of cultural emptiness and Septimus, like them, adopted a stance of indifference to culture as he perceives it. What Hans Arp states is revealing here:

> Dada aimed to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order.
> Dada wanted to replace the logical nonsense of the men of today by the illogically senseless. That is why we pounded with all our might on the big drum of dada and trumpeted the praises of unreason ...
> Dada denounces the infernal ruses of the official vocabulary of wisdom. Dada is for the senseless which does not mean nonsense. Dada is like nature. Dada is for nature and against art. Dada is direct like nature. Dada is for infinite sense and definite means.[48]

For Septimus, the 'reasonable deceptions of man' have been destroyed; he has seen through them. The new world he inhabits is one of negation. In fact, it is possible to say that he understands how 'illogically senseless' the world is. He has understood the 'ruses' of 'the official vocabulary of wisdom' and has seen humankind in its natural state. The pretences of society have been overthrown for Septimus. Hugo Ball felt that Dada was a requiem for society, a society completely bound even in the field of the arts by a demand for commercial success. It is in the examination of this aspect that Woolf returns to aesthetic

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[46] Dawn Ades, 'Dadaism and Surrealism' in *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), p. 111.
[47] Dawn Ades, 'Dadaism and Surrealism,' in *Concepts of Modern Art*, p. 111.
[48] Hans Arp , *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912 – 1947*, p. 48. Ruth Brandon says that what was achieved by Tristan Tzara at the Cabaret Voltaire 'was like nothing anyone had ever done before: it was negation, the very antithesis of anything previously known as art,' in Ruth Brandon, *Surreal Lives: The Surrealists 1917 – 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 101.

matters. The presentation of Septimus becomes an exploration of the appropriation of imagery by the middle classes.

Septimus believes that he has, in his isolation 'full of sublimity' (*MD* 83), learnt the truth, and this truth is bound up in anti-cultural and anti-bourgeois sentiment which is so characteristic of both Expressionist and Dada art. Septimus knows, 'The supreme secret must be told to the cabinet; first, that trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love' (*MD* 61). However, he finds the actual articulation of these words to his audience virtually impossible, words and images being alike contaminated by the war, and such expression as he can achieve is likely to be seen by the civilized world as madness. In a piece published in *Almanach Der Blaue Reiter* in 1912, Franz Marc had stated:

> It is remarkable how differently people value spiritual and material goods.
>
> If someone has conquered a new colony for his country everybody rejoices; there will not be one moment of hesitation before possession is taken of it. Technical inventions are welcomed with the same kind of enthusiasm.
>
> If, however, somebody offers his country a purely spiritual gift, it is almost always rejected with agitation and indignation. His gift is regarded with suspicion, and every attempt is made to get rid of it. If it were permitted, the donor would even today be burned at the stake.[49]

This is not unlike the predicament in which Septimus finds himself. He has an arguably spiritual message that he wants to impart to the rest of humanity, but no one will listen to him. He is, in fact, rejected as mad while the rest of society wallows in the technological advancement which will eventually lead to another war. Septimus seems to see into the darkness of confusion in a way that the other characters do not. This suggests further parallels with Marc's

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[49] Franz Marc in H. K. Roethel, *The Blue Rider: with a catalogue of the works of Kandinsky, Klee, Macke, Marc and other Blue Rider Artists in the Municipal Gallery, Munich*, p. 110.

ideas. One of Marc's most well known paintings is *The Fate of the Animals* which was painted in 1913 and was partially destroyed by fire in 1916 and later restored by Paul Klee. This painting was originally entitled *The Trees Show their Rings, the Animals their Veins* and depicts animals in a storm-ravished landscape. In the centre of the picture, a tree which is, according to Cork, an evergreen ash, a symbol in North German Mythology for indestructibility, stretches at an angle over a blue deer which leans towards it.[50] This suggests a kind of tension which is characteristic of Expressionist painting, and the vision is apocalyptic yet hopeful. There will be struggle, yet also re-birth. Here, again, Nietzsche offers the foundations for such an idea. Nietzsche had said that 'the immediate effect of Dionysiac tragedy is that state and society, the gulf separating man from man, make way for an overwhelming sense of unity that goes back to the very heart of nature'.[51] Septimus thinks that the 'excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening … would have sent him mad' (*MD* 21-2) if he had not shut his eyes. Similarly, branches and birds 'all taken together meant the birth of a new religion' (*MD* 22). For Septimus, life is ultimately good. It is human nature that is at fault and he is living an artistic vision which he has no means of expressing. This is his ultimate revelation as he contemplates suicide and gives Holmes and Bradshaw a false sense of tragedy. This sense is linked to their misinterpretation of Septimus. Nietzsche had said that the common misinterpretation of Hamlet was that he was 'a John-a-dreams who, from too much reflection, from an excess of possibilities, so to speak, fails to act'.[52] This is like Holmes's and Bradshaw's interpretation of Septimus. Yet Nietzsche says that a fairer interpretation of Hamlet sees him as someone who has understood the world and therefore finds action repellant because 'action

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[50] Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth,* pp. 27-28.
[51] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 39.

depends on the veil of illusion'.[53] In fact, Clarissa's interpretation of Septimus's death is nearer the Nietzschean mark because Nietzsche describes, 'The metaphysical consolation (with which ... every tragedy leaves us)' as a sense 'that whatever superficial changes may occur, life is at bottom indestructibly powerful and joyful'.[54] For Nietzsche this is embodied in Greek tragedy in the Dionysiac satyr chorus. The ecstasy of the Dionysiac state contains what Nietzsche describes as a 'lethargic' element and 'thus through this gulf of oblivion, the worlds of everyday and Dionysiac reality become separated'.[55] Septimus, in the park, experiences moments of ecstatic engagement with life. These are interrupted by Rezia's attempts to bring him back to the every day world of logical nonsense, and Septimus's response to this world is one of repulsion.

Indeed, in *Mrs Dalloway*, what Arp had called the 'logical nonsense of the men of today'[56] seems to be represented not just by Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbred, but more particularly and more aggressively in the presentation of the doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw. Holmes's answer to Septimus's problems is that he should be kept busy; Septimus should immerse himself in the pre-war occupations of cricket and the music hall. Fussell notes that, 'Except for sex and drinking, amusement was largely found in language formally arranged, either in books and periodicals or at the theatre or music hall'.[57] As the suggestions are made, Septimus, keen as the Dadaist to 'trumpet the cause of unreason',[58] 'sat in an arm chair ... muttering messages about beauty' (*MD* 83) while staring at Lady Bradshaw's photograph which comes to symbolize the rational world of human relationships. Woolf, whose own mental history had left her with a profound distrust of the doctors on whom

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[52] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 39.
[53] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 39.
[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 39.
[55] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 39.
[56] Hans Arp , *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912 – 1947*, p. 48.
[57] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 158.

she based Holmes and Bradshaw, condemns these characters.[59] She rejects Sir William's 'official vocabulary of wisdom', his 'divine proportion', by mocking the thinking behind it. Sir William Bradshaw lives by the false Apolline notion of individuation, that 'nobody lives for himself alone' (*MD* 88) and he champions 'family affection' (*MD* 91), arguably another form of individuation. Woolf suggests that such motivation, based on notions of superiority, caused the war:

> Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatic, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion (*MD* 89).[60]

Here, Woolf's personification of Proportion (and her more dangerous sister Conversion) provides a cutting condemnation of these values, pointing out their complacent, smug conservatism and their misappropriation of words which promote the concept that everything that does not agree with them is insane. Septimus's reaction to Holmes and Bradshaw is to associate them rather than himself with madness and aggression: 'They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied' (*MD* 87) and they reflect messages that seem illustrative of Arp's comment, 'But our art did not disturb the bourgeois in their overcrowded madhouses'.[61] Septimus believes that he is sane, and not only sane, but the one with the message that the world is looking for. It is, therefore, significant that Holmes and Bradshaw, in whose interests it

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[58] Hans Arp , *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912 – 1947*, p. 48.
[59] An account of Woolf's own fear of doctors like Holmes and Bradshaw is given by Roger Poole in *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 1995), pp. 161 – 62. Thomas Caramagio, in *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 226 –228, looks at how Woolf used her own experience to help her create Septimus Smith.
[60] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), pp. 333-336. Lee records how Leonard Woolf on the advice of the doctors forbade Virginia to have children.
[61] Hans Arp , *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912 – 1947*, p. 77.

is to avoid the message, do their best to silence Septimus. They want to maintain their separate Apolline security.

Ultimately, in Septimus's mind, the antagonism of war has been redefined into a strain of absolute scepticism that Nicholls notes in Dada.[62] Furthermore, Dada involved its protagonists in a kind of Dionysian revolt which included noise and primitive spontaneity. Yet, Peter Nicholls in *Modernisms* notes that:

> Almost from the first, Dadaists would occupy a deliberately ambiguous position, condemning the barbarity of war while drawing on those same destructive energies to fuel their own anti-culturalism.[63]

It was the aim of many of the Dadaist shows to incite people to angry action so that they gave up humanity and acquired animal-like characteristics, and Septimus notes these animal characteristics in his fellow human beings; yet aggression is also noted in his reaction to Holmes and Bradshaw. Dada also meant loss of the individual and the subsuming of the ego. Hans Arp stated, 'the renaissance puffed up human reason with pride, modern times with their science and technology have made man a megalomaniac'.[64] It is precisely the ego that Miss Pole and Mr Brewer had tried to foster in Septimus when they recommended education and football respectively, and it is the rejection of these that characterizes Septimus's post-war protest and which arguably leads to the subsuming of his ego. Sloterdijk had said 'the Dadaist hatred of culture is logically directed inwardly, against the culture-in-me that I once "possessed" and that is now good for nothing'.[65] And Gascoyne notes:

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[62] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide,* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 223.
[63] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, pp. 223-4.
[64] Hans Arp , *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912 – 1947*, p. 72.
[65] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 231.

> Negativism, revolt, destruction of all values, Dada was a violent protest against art, literature, morals, society. It spat in the eye of the world. Life is a disgusting riddle, but we can ask harder ones, was the Dadaist attitude. To many intelligent men at the time, suicide seemed to be the one remaining solution to the problem of living.[66]

In this context, it is important to examine Septimus's suicide, because if Dada 'logic' is followed to the end, suicide is the only action. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche cites the story of Midas and Silenus. Silenus, captured by Midas, is asked by the king for the answer to the question, 'what is the best and most desirable thing for mankind?'[67] He is told that the best thing is not to have been born at all, to be nothing, while 'the second best thing ... is to die soon'.[68] Septimus rejects birth and will not give Rezia the children she wants because 'One cannot bring children into a world like this one. One cannot perpetuate the suffering' (*MD* 80). There is also some evidence to suggest that Septimus's suicide is not merely an impulsive action. At Hampton Court, he has spoken to Rezia of the possibility of killing themselves. Indeed, his attitude to death is one of reason: 'He would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he had seen them making up lies ... He knew the meaning of the world' (*MD* 60). Suicide becomes for Septimus a means of communicating. Suicide is, therefore, not an egotistical selfish action but one which denies the self. Yet in the society he rejects, to take one's own life is viewed with suspicion and seen to be a sign of madness, and ultimately to Septimus, suicide becomes the one act of defiance. Early in the novel, Rezia is embarrassed and horrified because Septimus talks of suicide (*MD* 16). As she reflects on Septimus's ability to talk about suicide it is significant to note that she feels that Septimus 'wasn't Septimus any longer' (*MD* 59). Septimus has lost his identity before he dies.

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[66] David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (London: Cassell, 1970), pp. 23-4.
[67] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 22.

Surrealists were also interested in suicide as a phenomenon, and they believed that madness was freedom.[69] It is possibly significant that as Woolf was writing *Mrs Dalloway,* the Surrealist Movement was emerging from the shell of Dadaism. Although it would not produce its first manifesto until after the publication of Woolf's novel, some of the ideas of this movement seem to have impinged on this text. These are an extension of the Dadaist idea that Rex Last attributes to Hugo Ball. Last says that Ball is directing attention to:

> the world outside, where urban, civilized man continues to act as if he were still in contact with the natural world and part of the continuum of creation, and is totally unaware that his very state of 'civilization' has alienated him and rendered him a comic figure in cap and bells.[70]

In such an inverted world it is Holmes and Bradshaw who are mad. The Surrealist Movement questioned whether suicide was a solution and its fascination with suicide can be shown by the fact that every other page of the manifesto had a press cutting dealing with a suicide. André Breton, who was one of the most important members of the early Surrealist movement, had been devastated by the suicide of his friend Jacques Vaché in 1918, Gascoyne notes in *A Short Survey of Surrealism*. Here, Gascoyne states that Vaché's suicide demonstrated, 'Dada in his life rather than in anything he produced',[71] which seems to suggest Septimus's achievement in that his suicide communicates to Clarissa in a way that he couldn't have hoped to have communicated through art. And communication is as important for the Surrealists as it was for Septimus. Breton's experiments with automatic writing resulted in the publication of *The Magnetic Fields* in 1920. He had worked on this with Soupault. Where Tzara and his Dadaist colleagues had

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[68] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 22.
[69] First manifesto in David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism,* p. 59.
[70] R. W. Last, *German Dadaist Literature: Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp*, p. 101.
[71] David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism,* p. 24.

been inclined to reject psychoanalysis, Breton, who had been a medical assistant during the war, had read Freud and had experimented recording the dreams of soldiers traumatized by war. Woolf seems to allow Septimus to experiment with free expression of this kind. Just before he dies, he asks Rezia to bring him 'his papers, the things he had written, things she had written for him' (*MD* 131). This includes:

> Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings - were they? - on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences - the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! He cried. Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans - his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister, Universal love: the meaning of the world (*MD* 131).

We learn that Septimus writes a lot, 'The table drawer was full of those writings' (*MD* 124). We also know that other people, for example the girl who does the room who was 'in fits of laughter' as she read one of his pieces, fail to understand and that this distresses Septimus. It is the socially indoctrinated laughing at the expense of a hard-won, alienating knowledge. Yet what Septimus lacks is a method of interpreting his visions. He opposes art movements which have let him down and while he *lives* ideas of some of the more radical art movements of his times, he has no access to movements, such as Expressionism and Surrealism, which would have understood him and given him an outlet for his dreams. And, indeed, Surrealism was not just about dislocation. Nicholls states that, 'for the Surrealists the voice of the unconscious was above all prophetic, pointing not to some psychic dislocation

but rather to the promise of the self's eventual unity'.[72] He goes on to emphasize the Surrealists' vision of totality, which could be what Septimus is referring to when he talks of Universal Love.

Septimus's attitude to suicide does exhibit the nihilistic streak which is so typical of the aesthetic movements examined here, and which culminated in Dadaist and Surrealist theory. However, Septimus's actual accomplishment of the deed comes because he wants to escape the most ardent exponents of the bourgeois world, Doctors Holmes and Bradshaw. Having considered various methods, Septimus realizes that the only method is the window, a method that is sure to satisfy the bourgeois, 'It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing' (*MD* 132). Septimus's final act of defiance comes with the words, 'I'll give it to you!' and this allows Holmes the chance to show one final moment of rejection. His description of Septimus as 'the coward' is the ultimate misunderstanding, because we know that Septimus did not want to die, 'Life was good'; he dies trying to impart a message. Rezia achieves some sense of understanding as Septimus had known she would. Drugged to help her cope with the 'tragedy', Rezia experiences almost surreal dreams in which she sees the world in terms of Septimus's images. Septimus had earlier noted, 'Communication is happiness' (*MD* 84), and an even more significant moment of connection is the one with Clarissa Dalloway who notes when she hears of Septimus's suicide, 'Death was an attempt to communicate ... There was an embrace in death' (*MD* 163).

Septimus's suicide acts out the nihilism which Nietzsche had warned against, for one of the most radical aspects of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* was the fact that his thesis was opposed to the conception of Greek culture in German academic circles which was founded in what Ritchie Robertson describes as 'the beauty of a statue or in the joyous life of the gods

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[72] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 281.

on Mount Olympus'.[73] Nietzsche is, of course, suggesting a second dimension, that there are two sides to Greek culture. Robertson goes on to stress the fact that Nietzsche believed that the Greeks had created the ideal world of Olympus because they were aware that life was a painful struggle. However, the strain of believing in this ideal meant that they also needed relief and 'hence they were attracted by the savage, orgiastic cult of Dionysus'.[74] Holmes and Bradshaw and their bourgeois companions show understanding of the need to aspire to an ideal world but to them it is exclusive and they understand it only in so far as it supports their aspirations. This means they have to ignore the Dionysiac side of life. Septimus has of course seen both sides. He has aspired to the world of Apolline order and he has through the war come to understand the painful horror of the transience of life. Yet it is important to note that in summing up Nietzsche's statements on tragedy, Robertson suggests:

> The artistic form of tragedy is Apolline, but the chorus is derived from the crowd of Dionysiac worshippers, and the hero is doomed to lose his individuality and perish, like Dionysus himself, who was torn to pieces by his frenzied followers.[75]

And Septimus is in fact torn to pieces by the Dionysian forces as much as by those of the Apolline world of Holmes and Bradshaw, for by rejecting the Apolline entirely, he rejects the means by which his views might find expression. Ultimately, it is the fact that the Apolline allowed the pain of the Dionysiac to gain expression that is important. Alison Sinclair states that:

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[73] Ritchie Robertson, 'Primitivism and Psychology: Nietzsche, Freud, Thomas Mann' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies, p. 81.
[74] Ritchie Robertson, 'Primitivism and Psychology: Nietzsche, Freud, Thomas Mann' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, p. 81.
[75] Ritchie Robertson, 'Primitivism and Psychology: Nietzsche, Freud, Thomas Mann' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, p. 81.

> Placed in the context of the avant-garde, we can equate these two sides, the Apolline and the Dionysiac with the worlds of the conscious and the unconscious respectively, but we can also go further, since what is Dionysiac relates to the 'guts' of experience. The Dionysiac ... was not simply the unknown, or even simply the 'natural', but connects with what is painful, unacceptable, and yet is an unquestionably real part of our lives, whereas the Apolline connects with the sense we make of our experience, the finished formulation that we give it.[76]

For Septimus, the key to expression and survival is the joining together of the Apolline and the Dionysiac, and yet this is a solution that he cannot find. The Apolline world he finds himself in has made itself so repellant to him that in his complete rejection of it he is left with no structured aesthetic means of expression: the only option therefore is suicide or self-destruction.

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Where Septimus has been denied an acceptable mode of expression for his Dionysiac understanding, Clarissa has allowed herself plenty of ways of expressing her Apolline view. By calling the novel *Mrs Dalloway* and using Clarissa's party to provide aesthetic structure, Woolf is in fact making a point about the bourgeois culture's powers of and opportunities for expression. However, needless to say, Woolf is critical of this and in many ways, Woolf is suggesting that Clarissa on her own is just as limited as Septimus. The difference between the two is that Clarissa has chosen the world of Apolline security while Septimus has been thrust into the world of Dionysiac experience. For both Clarissa and Septimus, the June day affords a sense of engagement with life as already noted. In Clarissa, this sense is linked with recollections of the past, and the paths not taken which might have enabled her

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[76] Alison Sinclair, 'Avant-garde Theatre and the Return of Dionysos: Nietzsche, Jung, Valle-Inclán, Lorca, Artaud' in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, p. 247.

to experience the meaning of life in the way that she instantly senses Septimus has done. The narrator enables us to be aware of Clarissa's own sacrifice even if we are aware of its insignificance in comparison to Septimus's sacrifice. I have noted earlier that Clarissa's engagement with the June day is in parenthesis, suggesting that it is a marginalized part of her existence. It is also important to note that in that passage attention is drawn to Clarissa's love of dancing; it is noted 'To dance, to ride, she loved all that' (*MD* 8). Yet one of the things that is missing from Clarissa's party is the music that would have allowed for dancing. Clarissa tells Lord Gayton and Nancy Blow, 'I had meant to have dancing' (*MD* 157), and while talking to Jim Hutton, she 'had half a mind to snatch him off and set him down at the piano ... For he played divinely' (*MD* 156). However, something within Clarissa prevents her from doing this and she allows the noise of the party, the noise created by talk, to dominate. This is reminiscent of Woolf's comments in 'Street Music' noted earlier:

> It is because music incites within us something that is wild and inhuman like itself - a spirit that we would willingly stamp out and forget - that we are distrustful of musicians and loath to put ourselves under their power.[77]

It hints at Clarissa's inability to take risks. The essence of this is shown in Clarissa's musings on Septimus's death when the narrator notes, 'She had thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away' (*MD* 163). Clarissa's experience offered her, when young, the chance to understand and embrace a Dionysiac ethos. This can be seen in a rather limited way in the opportunity to marry Peter Walsh rather than Richard Dalloway, and also, and perhaps more significantly, in her chance to understand the experience with Sally Seton.

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[77] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 29.

For Clarissa, Sally represents something unusual. The experience of Sally at Bourton, to which Clarissa's mind easily reverts, is initially memorable because of Sally's 'walking in quite unexpectedly without a penny in her pocket' (*MD* 31) as she had 'rushed off in a passion' (*MD* 31). (Sally's arrival, uninvited, at Clarissa's party is a more muted version of this earlier action which demonstrates both Sally's ability to behave in an unconventional way and the ability of society to quash the power of the shocking rebellions of youth.) The young Sally enables Clarissa to see that life at Bourton is sheltered and rather restricted, allowing her to taste a much freer and more passionate world of freedom; this world is allied to Dionysiac expression. Clarissa and Sally talk of 'how they were to reform the world' (*MD* 31), an action which is to begin with the founding of a society to abolish private property. Clarissa's growing, but limited, awareness of the possibility of a mode of existence different from the one that Bourton offers her awakens in her feelings for Sally which are different from and unsurpassed by anything she has subsequently felt, so that she is able to feel 'if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy' (*MD* 32), a coinage to which Septimus could relate. This culminates in the kiss which represents a moment of engagement with another way of life. The narrator allows Clarissa to evaluate this as 'the most exquisite moment of her whole life' (*MD* 33), and states 'the whole world might have turned upside down' (*MD* 33). This is linked with her sense that 'she felt she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond … which, as they walked …, she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling' (*MD* 33). Clarissa's feeling of revelation is not unlike Septimus's understanding. What is of importance here is the way it is described. The experience 'might have' turned 'the world upside down' but it didn't; the radiance of the diamond might have burnt through, but ultimately, Clarissa covered it up again. For Clarissa there was a window that allowed her to view a mode of existence different from the one that she was used to, a

world that offered free expression, equality and understanding. To take the path to such an existence would have been a gamble. It would have been responding to something within her, in fact, it would have been a similar kind of response to the one that Woolf had associated with the musician in 'Street Music'. It might have been construed as madness for as Woolf said in that essay, 'we have trained ourselves to such a perfection of civilization that expression of any kind has something almost indecent - certainly irreticent - about it'.[78] The older Clarissa recognizes her inability to take such risks when she realizes that the only thing she has ever ventured was the shilling in the Serpentine. Septimus's death makes her realize that her sacrifices and her attempts to communicate have been insignificant. Clarissa was also offered the opportunity to exist in the opposite of the Dionysiac world, the world that her family approves of, the Apolline world of Richard Dalloway, and it is this path that she chooses to follow. Clarissa opted for the relatively safe world of words and projected images. And yet there was sacrifice for her too, for the Clarissa who walks through London on the day of her party is one who has subsumed her true self in the bourgeois world which Septimus has seen through and for which the party becomes the symbol. She has almost become a piece of bourgeois art work.

The novel is of course structured around the preparations for the party and the party itself. It begins with Clarissa's determination to 'buy the flowers herself' (*MD* 5) and her trip to the Bond Street flower shop. The flowers form a part of the image that Clarissa wants to present to the world and the imagery used to describe them has taken on aspects of the civilized world. The roses look 'like frilled linen clean from the laundry' (*MD* 13); the carnations are 'dark and prim' (*MD* 13). However, underpinning all of the images of the party's flowers is Clarissa's sense, not articulated but in her musings, that there is something beyond the civilized social environment she inhabits. Later, when

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[78] Virginia Woolf, 'Street Music' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, pp. 28-29.

thinking about Sally Seton, she recalls Sally's 'way with flowers' (*MD* 31) which is at odds with the conventional treatment of flowers at Bourton. Sally picked 'all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together – cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water bowls. The effect was extraordinary' (*MD* 32). However, Clarissa is not necessarily any more deceived by this world than the post-war Septimus. She recognizes its limitations and has regrets yet she also is aware of its advantages. It is now worth exploring why Clarissa, acknowledging that there is another more extraordinary way, chose the way of life she did.

It is important to note that there are things about her social environment that Clarissa values. She feels that she was right to reject Peter Walsh and to opt for Richard Dalloway 'for in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be' (*MD* 9), and while the narrator may seem to imply Clarissa's mistrust of extreme representatives of this social group such as Hugh Whitbread, there are characters whom Clarissa finds admirable, for instance, Lady Bexborough 'the woman she admired most' (*MD* 10), 'who opened a bazaar … with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite killed' (*MD* 6). It is the restraint of this society that Clarissa appreciates because 'this late age of the world's experience had bred in them all … a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing' (*MD* 10), and the ability to curb such a sense of devastation in such a manner, she acknowledges as necessary. Clarissa also mistrusts anything that seems to threaten the security provided by her upper class existence. This can be seen in her acute mistrust of Miss Kilman. Clarissa's snobbery is awakened by Miss Kilman as is her sense of dislike for what the woman represents. Miss Kilman arouses within Clarissa a kind of hatred and 'it rasped her … to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs crackling and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul' (*MD* 13). It is the stirrings of such feelings which demand comparison with an

Expressionist rationale and which indeed are as capable of reminding us of Marc's paintings as any image used by Septimus, that frighten Clarissa and undermine her security, for it is possible to argue that the society that Clarissa has embraced has an acute fear of such Dionysiac sensations. For Clarissa it hints at her inability to suppress entirely such powerful feelings.

Indeed, in her musings as well as in her engagement with the June day, Clarissa shows strong associations with Septimus's Dionysiac stance. She has a sense of the vitality of life and her imagery is in many respects that of Septimus though in a rather more muted form. For instance, sea imagery can be found in Clarissa's thoughts on entering a room, where we are told she felt:

> an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break ... only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl (*MD* 29).

However, the imagery used to describe Clarissa's feelings is more comforting and conciliatory; where Septimus is the drowned sailor, Clarissa is just a diver, skilled in survival. While both experience a sense of what Clarissa describes as 'an emptiness about the heart of life' (*MD* 29), the difference lies in their reaction to this revelation. To Septimus it is devastating, while to Clarissa, because she has the structure of her society to support her, it is a bearable if somewhat unsettling realization.

Clarissa survives while Septimus dies, and yet she survives at a cost because Clarissa recognizes the sterility and emotional austerity of her life. First, she is 'Mrs Dalloway, not even Clarissa any more' (*MD* 11). Also, she feels confined to the attic room with the narrow bed and 'she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet' (*MD* 29). Ultimately, she must acknowledge that she has only memories of the promise of a different world, and as she tries to recall the feeling that she had

when young, by repeating the words she had said, she is forced to acknowledge, 'the words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion' (*MD* 32). She has paid a huge price for civilization; at least superficially she had done what was expected of her when young. Now, as the society hostess, she is still fulfilling the expectations of her society as she gives parties.

However, part of the problem for Clarissa is her sense that both she and her parties are misunderstood by their audience. She feels that both Peter Walsh and her husband fail to understand that her parties are an offering to life. The narrator states, 'it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?' (*MD* 109); the audience and recipient remain undefined. For Clarissa, the party is the only means of communication, 'nothing else had she of the slightest importance' (*MD* 109), and her sense of impotence, that in spite of all her efforts the parties might be misconstrued, might not communicate, connects her very firmly with Septimus who in his Dionysiac interpretation of the world feels a similar but much more devastating inability to communicate. The party itself is a social success. It epitomizes social ritual because it provides opportunity for the members of that society to meet and interact. It is the product of a society which inhibits full expression of the spirit and yet paradoxically the party is in itself a form of expression: it illustrates a way of life governed by extreme Apolline principles. For Clarissa it becomes a forum for the expression of her role as Mrs Dalloway, yet not for the 'Clarissa' part of her being, her inner self. Clarissa's feelings are mixed because while she recognizes 'for her own part, it was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it' (*MD* 151) and 'anybody could do it' (*MD* 151), she also acknowledges 'yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn't help feeling that she had ... made this happen' (*MD* 151). Her Apolline world provides a structure for the combination of ideas to work and, however inadequate and restrictive, gives a forum for expression. She must acknowledge an admiration for the society she

has chosen and for its values for allowing her this security however limited it may be. Septimus is denied this; his automatic writing and ultimately his suicide are misunderstood: communication is achieved only through the art of Woolf's novel and the role the writer ascribes to Clarissa.

Ultimately, Clarissa comes to feel that perhaps Septimus's means of communication is a powerful assault on the values of her world. She recognizes 'a thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop in every day corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved' (*MD* 163). Thus she feels that her society is implicated in the guilt. At the party there is the unceasing noise of chatter which prevents them from thinking, there is concern about image which prevents examination of the psyche. The things that matter are lost. Clarissa acknowledges, 'Death was a defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate ... there was an embrace in death' (*MD* 163). Her final realization is that 'she felt somehow very like him' (*MD* 165). This moment of epiphany and connection is important because it demonstrates the possibility of connection between the two worlds. Ultimately, it must be acknowledged that Clarissa never actually meets Septimus and her estimation of his death and her subsequent evaluation of his message are all supposition on her part, and yet Woolf attributes to her, if only for a moment, the ultimate understanding. Clarissa must acknowledge the repression of her own social sphere in order to form this connection. She must also acknowledge and give weight to the Dionysiac element which is within her. It is rather ironic that Septimus only achieves communication of his message through a member of the very society whose values he rejected and that Woolf should use a member of this society for the aesthetic merging of the Apolline and Dionysiac forces into the kind of equilibrium that Nietzsche said affords communication in Attic tragedy. It is perhaps a reminder of the paradoxical relationship between the arts and society which was inherent in the conception of Dadaism. Once again, combination is

the key and it is important to return to Nietzsche's opening assertion in *The Birth of Tragedy* that:

> We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*.[79]

It is possible that this is the experience of Woolf's reader.

The novel as a whole, therefore, presents us with one day in the lives of these two diametrically opposed characters; a day in which Clarissa triumphs in her Apolline art and Septimus is subsumed by his Dionysiac inability to communicate in a way that the world understands. The link between Clarissa and the Apolline arts and between Septimus and the Dionysiac arts is a profound one and one which allows Woolf to look at the question of *Gesamtkunstwerk* from a different stand point. Nietzsche, at the time he wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, saw in Wagner's operas the ability to combine the Apolline / Dionysiac oppositions to create a total artwork. By using characters who arguably represent the polarities outlined in Nietzsche's work, Woolf is examining a battle inherent in Modern aesthetic circles, for in *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf uses her characters to explore the conservative art forms of the Apolline world and the radically powerful art forms of the Dionysiac. While initially these characters allow Woolf to look again at the possibilities of the combination of the arts of literature, painting and music, in addition to this, the creation of Septimus has allowed her to examine the issues behind many of the most revolutionary of Modern movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism, while Clarissa enables Woolf to look at the illusory deceptions of bourgeois art. In the novel, the polar opposites are, as we have seen, momentarily connected in the understanding that Clarissa has of Septimus's death, and it

seems that ultimately it is connection between the forces that Woolf is advocating. In this she exhibits a similar line of thinking to Nietzsche, who saw in tragedy a combining of the two forces: 'Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, but Apollo finally speaks the language of Dionysus, and thus is attained the supreme goal of tragedy and of art in general'.[80] However, whereas Nietzsche seems to believe that this is achieved in the work of Wagner, Septimus never really learns to speak 'the language of Apollo' again, and Clarissa only fleetingly understands 'the language of Dionysus' which she dare not speak aloud. There is no music at her party. So, while Woolf knows that combination is the answer, she uses this novel to show how difficult it is to achieve that aesthetic communication in her contemporary society. Once again, Wagner provides a starting point, this time Nietzsche develops the idea, but Woolf knows that it is the quest of the Modernist to adapt and re-define the model into Modern idiom.

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[79] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 14.
[80] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, p. 104.

## Chapter 5: The Influence of Woolf's English Cultural Heritage and Roger Fry on *Gesamtkunstwerk* Theories in *To the Lighthouse*

Having looked at a fundamentally European heritage in her previous novel Woolf turns, in *To the Lighthouse*, to her English past and her personal history. This chapter will look at two main issues: Woolf's evaluation of her parents and the impact of her mother's cultural background, and the impact of Roger Fry on Woolf's developing aesthetic theory. The evaluation of her mother's links with the Pre-Raphaelite movement and the movements that grew out of it, together with Woolf's assimilation of the ideas of Roger Fry, are significant because they offer an opportunity to look at various ways in which the arts can be combined. I shall argue that in this novel they lead to more than an assessment of ideas and experiments with already existing Modern techniques, they allow Woolf to establish her own form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

That Woolf's parents had come, by the 1920s, to symbolize for her the Victorian era has been well established in recent biographies.[1] It is important to establish the nature of that influence in the context of this thesis. Sir Leslie Stephen had clearly come, by the time Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse,* to represent all that was repressive in Victorian society. She rebelled against what she saw as his philistine qualities and his rejection of art, literature and music, and as she records, the writing of this novel helped her to evaluate her memories, so that in the much later *A Sketch of the Past*, while she asserts that: 'My father was spartan, ascetic, puritanical. He had I think no feeling for pictures; no ear for music; no sense of the sounds of words ... this leads me to think that my natural love for beauty was checked by some ancestral dread',[2] she is also able to state, 'he obsessed me ...Until I wrote it out [in *To the*

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[1] Accounts of it are given in Mitchell Leaska's *Granite and Rainbow*, and in Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*.

*Lighthouse*], I would find my lips moving; I would be arguing with him; raging against him; saying to myself all that I never said to him'.[3] Julia Stephen left just as marked an impression on her youngest daughter, an impression that was equally important for Woolf's aesthetic development. Quentin Bell remarks in *Bloomsbury*, 'Leslie Stephen's daughters inherited something from both their very remarkable parents; but their affections lay on the maternal side'.[4] In *Old Bloomsbury* Woolf records that her mother 'had been brought up in the Watts-Venetian-Little Holland House tradition'.[5] The significance of this tradition is, I shall argue, important for an evaluation of Woolf's examination of the combination of painting, literary and musical associations in *To the Lighthouse*. While the earlier novels look at ostensibly Modern issues, linking literature to the painting and music of Woolf's contemporary society, *To the Lighthouse* offers an examination of the English cultural heritage of literary Modernism. It is perhaps fitting that a novel, which is arguably based on Woolf's impressions of her parents and their Victorian world, should look at the impact of that society on her Modern world.

A significant part of Woolf's evaluation of her parents stems from her assessment of them not just as individuals but as typical representatives of two different aspects of their age. In fact, they are in many respects defined as polar opposites, and as such come to exemplify the male and female roles and characteristics championed by a narrow-minded and repressive Victorian society. They are seen as both her heritage and as having in some way handicapped her by their strong personalities. Both are associated in Woolf's mind with beauty: Sir Leslie Stephen with Woolf's feeling 'that [her] natural love for beauty was checked by some ancestral dread' mentioned earlier, and Julia Stephen with the assessment that, 'We were famous for our beauty - my

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[2] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Grafton, 1989), p. 77.
[3] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 119.
[4] Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968), p. 40.
[5] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 199.

mother's beauty, Stella's beauty, gave me, as early as I can remember, pride and pleasure'.[6] Woolf assesses these feelings as she tries to account for her own sense of shame at looking in a mirror. Both parents are important for their impact on *To the Lighthouse*, and part of this must be linked to their impact on their daughter's understanding of beauty and art. Writing to Vanessa Bell, who had just read *To the Lighthouse*, in May 1927 Woolf said of her mother, 'she always haunted me, partly, I suppose, her beauty; and then dying at that moment, I suppose she cut a great figure in one's mind'.[7]

While Sir Leslie Stephen may have been condemned by his daughter for his lack of understanding of aesthetic beauty, he was clearly well aware of his second wife's physical beauty. This can be seen clearly in his tribute to Julia, his *Mausoleum Book*, written following her death. Here, he records, 'I only wished to say that Julia's beauty was conspicuous from her childhood'.[8] He noted his first vision of her, 'I saw and remembered her, as I might have seen and remembered the Sistine Madonna or any other presentation of superlative beauty'.[9] Sir Leslie Stephen's ideas of his wife's beauty are widely accepted to have been idealized; he develops ideas on her beauty which extend far beyond her physical appearance:

> Her beauty was of the kind which seems to imply - as it most certainly did accompany - equal beauty of soul, refinement, nobility and tenderness of character; and which yet did not imply, as some beauty called 'spiritual' may do, any lack of 'material' beauty. It was just the perfect balance ... which made me feel when I looked at her the kind of pleasure which I suppose keen artistic sense to derive from a masterpiece of Greek sculpture.[10]

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[6] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 77.
[7] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 383.
[8] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, with an introduction by Quentin Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 28.
[9] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, p. 31.
[10] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, p. 32.

The *Mausoleum Book* was written for the children, and Frances Spalding in her biography of Vanessa Bell records how, while ill during the Christmas of 1912, Vanessa read from the book to Duncan Grant and Adrian Stephen.[11] What is significant here is that Sir Leslie Stephen seems to acknowledge his lack of appreciation of art, and yet his wife is constantly alluded to in aesthetic terms. Of his later relationship with Julia he declares, 'It seemed again that there was music running through me, not altogether cheerful, not altogether unhesitating, but delicious and inspiring. Julia was that strange solemn music to which my whole nature seemed to be set. The music has made all my later life a harmony till now'.[12]

Indeed, the story of Julia Stephen does have an aesthetic affiliation. It is this that is important for an understanding of Woolf's novel. As a child and young woman, she had frequently visited her aunt, Sara Prinsep, who, in 1850, had been party to the setting up of a salon at Little Holland House. Here, they had entertained Tennyson, Browning, Ruskin and, perhaps most significantly for the young Julia, D.G. Rossetti, Burne-Jones and G.F. Watts.[13] Julia is known to have visited Little Holland House regularly and the Pre-Raphaelite painters and their successors were known to her. Holman Hunt proposed to her. When he later married, and records suggest that it was to a woman very much like her, he wrote to her asking her to be a god parent to his child. Sir Leslie Stephen records that Hunt said in the letter that he still regarded her 'with reverence'.[14] In addition, Woolner asked Julia's mother's permission to sculpt her daughter.[15] Julia posed for Burne-Jones and was sketched by G. F. Watts.[16] This placed Julia within the boundaries of the major experimental

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[11] Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (London: Phoenix Giants, 1996; first published, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), p. 119.
[12] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, pp. 47-8.
[13] Mitchell Leaska, *Granite and Rainbow*, pp. 28 – 29.
[14] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, p. 28.
[15] Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book*, p. 28.
[16] Mitchell Leaska, *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 27.

aesthetic movements of the late nineteenth-century. It was an influence that would have a significant impact on the writing of her youngest daughter. This is what I want to look at here.

Relatives such as Annie Ritchie, as well as Sir Leslie Stephen, would have made Virginia Woolf aware of her mother's youth. Indeed, visions of it haunt Woolf's autobiographical essays such as *A Sketch of the Past* where Woolf describes what she sees as 'a summer afternoon world',[17] and 'tea tables with great bowls of strawberries and cream'[18] with the Pattle sisters holding court. It is against this background that she paints a picture of her mother in these essays. Woolf asserts that Julia was entitled to this experience, which she sees as 'training which was more important than any she had from governesses',[19] by virtue of her beauty. Woolf's picture of life at Little Holland House is sentimentalized in an ironical fashion. She seems to be pointing out that such a world is a part of the past. The training that her mother received there, Woolf sums up thus:

> She was taught there to take such part as girls did then in the lives of distinguished men; to pour out tea; to hand them their strawberries and cream; to listen devoutly, reverently to their wisdom; to accept the fact that Watts was the great painter; Tennyson the great poet; and to dance with the Prince of Wales.[20]

In *22 Hyde Park Gate* Woolf had stated, 'My mother believed that all men required an infinity of care'.[21] This was the care that she showed to Sir Leslie Stephen, the care that her children felt he demanded, and the care that perhaps led to her early death. The pictures Woolf creates of her mother owe much to

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[17] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 96.
[18] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 96.
[19] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 96.
[20] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 98. This is very much the world that *Jacob's Room's* Clara Durrant inhabits.
[21] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 180.

the Pre-Raphaelite world, and this world is evoked in many ways in *To the Lighthouse*, where the first section seems alive with the philosophies, images and arguably even the techniques of this movement and the later Aesthetic and Symbolist movements that grew out of it. That Woolf's mother could be recognized in Mrs Ramsay is made clear by Vanessa's comments on the novel,[22] and from Woolf's letter of 25th May 1927 which responds to Vanessa's comments. Here she states, 'I'm in a terrible state of pleasure that you should think Mrs Ramsay so like mother'.[23] Woolf, in exploring the image and aura of her mother in the presentation of Mrs Ramsay, was also looking at the aesthetic theories which must have formed a part of her mother's 'education' and which, however subconsciously, were a part of the image that Julia Stephen presented to the world. One of Woolf's main objectives in *To the Lighthouse* was very much to see how it would be possible to capture the essence of her mother. In *A Sketch of the Past*, she refers to a conversation she had, in 1939, with Mark Gertler, in which the painter asserted that painting was superior to literature and Woolf acknowledges, 'if one could give a sense of my mother's personality one would have to be an artist'.[24] The first part of *To the Lighthouse* does indeed outline and explore late Romantic ideas on painting and their potential and seems to hint at the transcendental powers of synaesthetic combinations of sound, image and text, which are limited by the position of Mrs Ramsay to moments of domestic bliss. The second section of the novel looks at how such ideas were undermined by the war and by the symbolical destruction of Mrs Ramsay, and of Prue and Andrew, who were becoming more extreme versions of their Victorian parents. In the final section the echoes of these earlier aesthetic theories and practices can still be found, but they have been reformulated into a Modernist idiom. As Quentin Bell said

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[22] Frances Spalding quotes Vanessa Bell's letter to her sister in which she tells Virginia Woolf, 'you have given a portrait of mother,' in *Vanessa Bell*, p. 219.
[23] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 38.
[24] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, pp. 94-5.

of his aunts, 'although they rejected the aesthetic of Little Holland House, they did not reject the assumption that the visual arts were supremely important'.[25] *Gesamtkunstwerk* is still important in the third section, but it is now handled more skilfully by the artist Lily Briscoe who, rejecting much of Mrs Ramsay's way of doing things, but nevertheless accepting the basic values behind the actions, re-works the images and ideas of the first section to prove that the adage of the Victorian Tansley that 'women can't paint' is no longer correct, while Woolf herself demonstrates the fallacy of his other assertion that 'women can't write'.

I now want to examine what the presentation of Mrs Ramsay owes to Woolf's Pre-Raphaelite heritage because the novel is actually looking at, first, whether or not it is possible to move away from this aesthetic stance. Having demonstrated that it is possible, the novel is exploring by what means this can be achieved. Looked at simply, the impressions we are given of Mrs Ramsay in the first section of *To the Lighthouse* do reflect a part of Julia Stephen's late Romantic heritage. Mrs Ramsay is acknowledged, by the men, to be supremely beautiful. Charles Tansley sees her against a picture of Queen Victoria and is forced to acknowledge, 'she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen' (*TL* 17). (It is significant that she is seen against the realist portrait of Queen Victoria as it emphasizes the different Victorian aesthetic values.) Tansley's view of Mrs Ramsay then takes on a more consciously visual emphasis as he sees her, 'with stars in her eyes and veils in her hair ... Stepping through the field of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair' (*TL* 17-18). Tansley's imagery, with its emphasis on stars and veils and on eyes and hair, has identified quintessential Pre-Raphaelite symbols. Such symbolism had culminated in Watts's assertion that:

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[25] Quentin Bell, *Bloomsbury*, p. 40.

the one thing which is more than ever clearly perceived is the density of the veil that covers the mystery of our being, at all times impenetrable, and to be impenetrable, in spite of which conviction we ever passionately yearn to pierce it. This yearning finds its natural expression in poetry, in art, and in music.[26]

Again, Tansley places Mrs Ramsay in a pastoral setting, which also formed part of the Pre-Raphaelite tradition and which is an idea of significance for the general portrayal of Mrs Ramsay's position, because it removes her from the 'real' world of commerce and education and marginalizes her. Woolf is, however, perhaps ridiculing Tansley's vision because of the rather bathetic cadence at the end of the paragraph where the exalted picture gives way to the statement, 'He took her bag' (*TL* 18) which seems to augment the folly of such male chivalry. Pre-Raphaelite symbolism is used consistently in the depiction of Mrs Ramsay, who has poetry books 'inscribed by the hand of the poet himself' with the words 'The happier Helen of our day' (*TL* 32).[27] William Bankes 'saw her at the end of the line, Greek, blue-eyed, straight-nosed' and feels 'the Graces assembling seemed to have joined hands in meadows of asphodel to compose that face' (*TL* 35). However, such an idea seems rather out of place in the modern world, and Bankes himself acknowledges this by noting, 'how incongruous it seemed to be telephoning to a woman like that' (*TL* 35). The thing that makes it difficult to reconcile Mrs Ramsay's image as the quintessential female beauty with her place in the modern aesthetic world is her individuality, 'the quivering thing, the living thing', that seems to suggest her desire to be seen as a human being rather than a symbol. Woolf is quite firmly indicating that this novel is about a movement away from the ideas of

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[26] Barbara Bryant, 'G. F. Watts and the Symbolist Vision' in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860 -1910*, ed. Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, p. 73.

[27] The Helen of Troy motif was frequently used in Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist literature in the portrayal of the *femme fatale*. An interesting assessment of the importance of this motif in Rossetti's verse is given in L Hönnighausen, *The Symbolist Tradition in Literature*, pp. 175 -176.

Pre-Raphaelite, Symbolist and Aesthetic movements. The highlighting of the incongruity of the ideas of these movements in the modern world is an important part of this re-evaluation.

However, Bankes's view of Mrs Ramsay seems to oscillate between the view of her as a goddess, as seen above, for whom he feels devotion and unsurpassed love, and a vision of her that bears some resemblance to the *femme fatale* vision that was the other side of the late Romantic depiction of women. In this light she takes on the role of the woman who lured his friend Ramsay into marriage and ruined Ramsay's chances of achieving eminence through scholarship. Like Woolf's father, Ramsay is undoubtedly aware of his wife's beauty. When Mrs Ramsay says of her Aunt, 'She was the most beautiful woman I ever saw' (*TL* 78), Ramsay replies, 'Somebody else was that,' and he refuses to acknowledge that the beauty of his daughter is greater than that of his wife. That Ramsay needs to keep a picture of his wife constantly before him is indicated by the fact that as he moves from the masculine battle of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' depicted in Tennyson's poem, to look at his wife and son, significantly framed by the window, 'the sight of them fortified him and satisfied him and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind' (*TL* 39). This makes the reader very aware of how different male experience was from female experience, and Woolf is using the novel to accentuate this. She will transfer her discussion to the aesthetic stance of the female later in this novel.

It is interesting that all three men mentioned here experience Mrs Ramsay as she stands in front of objects that will frame her. For Tansley she is by the picture of the monarch, for Bankes she has 'her head outlined absurdly by the gilt frame, over which she had tossed the green shawl' (*TL* 35-6), while her husband sees her against the window frame. This seems to assign to her a

position similar to that of the duchess in Robert Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess'. The male characters feel reassured by her stillness; the frame enables them to preserve the image they demand of a woman. It is as if she has submitted to their will. However, like Browning's Duchess, Mrs Ramsay is a woman who will not, in life, submit. The male characters may be able to keep their pictures of her in the domestic world, but in her mind, Mrs Ramsay is able to push aside the curtain of Rome. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf seems to be suggesting that these male visions of Mrs Ramsay are at odds with the contemporary world and what the male characters seem to have are fragments of another world which need to be modulated into Modernist vision. The pre-war symbols will be destroyed.

The reverential Madonna image of mother and child outlined in Mr Ramsay's mental image of his wife and son is important. It is of course an image with a long history, and Woolf chooses it in order to examine how to re-define an image in Modernist idiom. The early nineteen-twenties had seen a revival in France of the use of the image of mother and child, particularly mother and son. Silver, in *Esprit de Corps*, outlines the extent of this renascence. Describing Picasso's work of the 1920s, Silver says, 'Among his favourite themes - and one that would have been congenial to Poussin, Renoir, and Puvis - was that of *maternité*'.[28] Silver describes Picasso's *Mother and Child*, noting that it 'becomes a kind of emblem of the mythic endurance of the human species' (p. 280). His discussion examines the importance of such a depiction in the post-war years, and he gives examples from the work of other painters, noting Severini's *Family of the Commedia*, Albert Gleizes almost abstract *Mother and Child* and another picture by La Fresnaye (p. 282-3). The reason for the upsurge in such pictures in the nineteen-twenties, Silver suggests was the 'Exposition Nationale de la Maternité et de l'Énfance' which took place in the Bois de Boulogne in the summer of 1921. Created as part of

a reproductive propaganda machine designed to swell a population depleted by war, the 'Exposition' stated in its catalogue:

> If France is the light of the world, it is important not only for our country but even for the human species that this lighthouse never cease to cast its luminous beam on the uncertain road. What do we need to accomplish this? That the wonderful torchbearers who are our children may come into the world in great enough numbers (p. 282)

Further examples of the importance placed on such images, are the official images of motherhood used to advertise Peace Loans. One, by Henri Lebasque, shows 'a mother and suckling babe, with an older child seated alongside reading, ... before a hedge in the foreground; behind, a building is under construction, and in the far distance the post-war French factories produce at peak capacity' (p. 282). Lebasque's semi-realist post-war image seems in some way reminiscent of the image of James and his mother in the first part of Woolf's novel, where James cuts out pictures of machines demonstrating technological advance. But whether Woolf reflects this European trend or not, it is surely no surprise that Woolf, who was manifestly interested in painting both as a subject and as a technique and theory should use the image of mother and son. It is also no surprise that she should use it as a pivotal focus in this novel, given her exploration of contrasts and continuities between generations. It is her use of this image that must now be defined.

In the years before the war, Lily Brisco is painting a picture which has at its centre Mrs Ramsay and James, a picture that attempts to capture the essence of the scene at the Ramsays'. For Lily the re-defining of the image of mother and child in Modernist idiom seems to be the key to success, but to the supremely visual William Bankes, her presentation of mother and son as a

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[28] Kenneth E. Silver, Silver *Esprit de Corps*, p. 280.

'triangular purple shape' (*TL* 61) is irreverent. Bankes does not reject Lily's viewpoint, he thinks about it:

> Mother and child then - objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty - might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence (*TL* 61).

Woolf is looking here at the transition from the aesthetics of the late nineteenth century to the principles of Modern Post-Impressionism. Lily's picture, like the pictures of Gleizes and to a certain extent Picasso, attempts to move this symbolic representation away from the often sentimental narrative depiction of the Victorian world which became the medium of the twentieth-century propaganda posters Woolf would have seen during the war.[29] Bloomsbury painters had, themselves, toyed with images of mothers and children and had moved away from realist principles.[30] Lily cannot achieve this move in the first section of the novel situated as it is before World War 1. In her later biography of Roger Fry, Woolf looked at how Fry attempted to introduce people to Post-Impressionism at a similar time. I have noted in an earlier chapter that Woolf states:

> Were you puzzled? But why? And he would explain that it was quite easy to make the transition from Watts to Picasso; there was no break only continuation. They were only pushing things a little further.[31]

But this statement is relevant in this context for, in spite of Lily's attempts at communication, Bankes remains puzzled. He finds it hard to make the connection. When Lily tells him that she has 'made no attempt at likeness', he

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[29] The poster occasioned by the sinking of the *Lusitania* is just one example.
[30] R. Shone in *Bloomsbury Portraits* records how in 1918 Duncan Grant had painted a portrait of Vanessa Bell while she was pregnant, p. 178.
[31] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry*, p. 152.

challenges her, 'for what reason had she introduced them then?'(*TL* 61). He cannot move away from the idea of realist representation. Lily's 'reasons' for the introduction of shape are very much a question of aesthetics, 'if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need for darkness' (*TL* 61). Bankes tries to comprehend but his effort is not great. Mr Ramsay had stated that 'the arts are merely a decoration imposed on top of human life; they do not express it' (*TL* 50), and Bankes seems to identify with this adage. His response is to tell Lily of his picture of cherry trees in blossom 'which painters had praised, and valued at a higher price than he had given for it' (*TL* 62). For Bankes art means money; he is willing to listen to Lily's ideas in a vaguely indulgent way, but Lily cannot explain. Words are inadequate for such a task and Lily's inability to voice her feelings connects her closely with the Modern movement's at times inadequate attempts at communication with a more conventionally motivated public.

Lily's presentation of Mrs Ramsay in the painting is just one of the ways in which Lily indulges in ideas about her hostess which do not follow the mainstream, and which the male characters would find it hard to comprehend. For instance, she can perceive the love that Bankes feels for the image he has of Mrs Ramsay:

> it was love ... distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch its object; but, like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain (*TL* 55-6).

The fact that such feelings seem to tame the world makes Lily unable at this time to give voice to the criticism of Mrs Ramsay and her way of life that she instinctively acknowledges. Lily is for the time being overpowered by the aura of the Ramsays' way of life. In a similar way Woolf was able to acknowledge

the tremendous power of her visions of her mother and her mother's aesthetic world. And Lily acknowledges the inadequacies of faith in her own convictions, affirming, 'she [Mrs Ramsay] was unquestionably the loveliest of people ...; the best perhaps; but also, different too from the perfect shape which one saw there' (*TL* 57). This is very much like Woolf's vision of her mother which she asserted *To the Lighthouse* enabled her to put to rest.

It is revealing to look at the image that Mrs Ramsay has of herself. This must be done through an examination of another idea which has its roots in Pre-Raphaelite symbolism: Woolf's use of mirror imagery in this novel. The only person who can possibly understand the image that Lily has created is Mrs Ramsay herself, and much is made in the first part of the novel of the 'wedge-shaped core of darkness' (*TL* 72) that represents Mrs Ramsay's self. First, it is important to think about what Mrs Ramsay sees when she looks in the mirror. We learn very early on what Mrs Ramsay actually sees in the first of many references to mirrors in the novel. This demonstrates to us that she is under no illusions: 'When she looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought she might have managed things better - her husband; money; his books' (*TL* 9). Clearly Mrs Ramsay does not see herself as representing the archetypal Pre-Raphaelite heroine that the male characters see, but we also learn that she does not regret the way she has spent her life. Later, when Woolf presents her sitting at the dressing table, she is, like the subject of so many late Romantic paintings and poems, doing her hair.[32] When the children, performing the elaborate ritual of choosing the jewellery their mother is to wear, decorate her to make her look at her most attractive, they are in fact adding to Mrs Ramsay's symbolic presentation as the object of male desire and perpetuating her subservience. As the image of male desire, Mrs

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[32] J. B. Bullen *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 123 – 148. Bullen includes a section on the presentation of women in mirrors in Rossetti's work. He draws attention to *Fazio's Mistress* and *Woman Combing her Hair*.

Ramsay, who has already been likened to the beautiful Helen of Troy, begins once more to be equated with the Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist *femme fatale*, but Woolf ensures that unlike Rossetti's younger females, who stare at themselves in the mirror, Mrs Ramsay avoids her face. She is quite determinedly 'looking at her neck and shoulders (but avoiding her face), in the glass' (*TL* 92). This fact is important for our evaluation of such aesthetic symbols in a Modern world because it is one of many ideas that hints at the possibility of a different perspective. It is the development of this other perspective that is central in *To the Lighthouse*.

In *A Room of One's Own*, which was written for lectures Woolf gave the year after the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf stated:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle.[33]

It is true that when the mirror is first mentioned in connection with Mrs Ramsay, it allows her to reflect on her husband: 'she thought she might have managed things better - her husband; money; his books' (*TL* 9). It is his life she thinks about: how she might have done better by him and how she might have enabled him to have a 'bigger' self-image by reflecting his interests. However, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is redefining the staple Rossettian mirror image and so it is worth exploring Rossetti's use of the mirror which has been the subject of much analysis. Bullen quotes Hillis Miller: 'Why is it that when we men contemplate not ourselves in the mirror but our incongruous other self, a desirable woman contemplating herself, our own integrity is mutilated,

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[33] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), p. 35.

destroyed?'[34] Bullen goes on to point out that Hillis Miller is suggesting that Rossetti's mirrors show their male viewers' 'loss'. Bullen adds his own proviso to this, based on Freudian psychology:

> [H]uman loss cannot exist in isolation but must be predicated upon something. Freudian psychology tells us that it derives from a primal loss, the loss of the breast and the separation of the infant from the mother. In other words, 'loss', that is loss of identity, is constructed around, and serves to generate desire. In masculine terms it is generated by the threat of female withdrawal and its experience creates a concomitant desire for the female.[35]

That the female subjects of male painters were being used to explore male identity is also acknowledged by J. D. Hunt in *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination*. He states that the painters were using 'a beautiful woman as an image of the poet's introspection'.[36] He goes on to state that 'for Rossetti, a beautiful woman *was* an image of his soul',[37] and later quotes Holman Hunt who said that 'Rossetti's tendency in sketching a face [was] to convert the features of his sitter to his favourite ideal type'.[38] In an extremely interesting discussion on Rossetti's use of the male perceptions of female subjects, Bullen states that in the poetry, male need oscillates between the two states of desire and fear, and this could be seen to be true at least for Mr Ramsay's perception of his wife in *To the Lighthouse*. While discussing Rossetti's painting, Bullen identifies women who are 'indifferent' but 'desirable',[39] and describes the depiction of femininity as 'fetishistic'. He continues:

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[34] J. Hillis Miller, 'The Mirror's Secret: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Double Work of Art', *Victorian Poetry*, 29 4 (1991), 333-49:334 quoted in Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, pp. 123 –4.
[35] J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite*, pp. 123 -4.
[36] J. D. Hunt in *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination: 1848-1900* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 177.
[37] J. D. Hunt in *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination: 1848-1900*, p. 178.
[38] Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, I, 341 in J. D. Hunt in *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination: 1848-1900*, pp. 180-1.
[39] J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 125.

> Predicated upon a highly precarious sense of the self, the image is a memorial to loss, while at the same time it embodies the possibility of dangerous empowerment; the female may or may not be the possessor of the phallus.[40]

We might look at Rossetti's poem 'A Superscription', where a glass is held up by the principle of loss - to steady the shaken shadow, the poet creates a series of supportive females. 'The Portrait' is also worth consideration because of the shift from the woman to her position as a reflection of the poet's identity. Also of interest is Christina Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio'. Bullen says, 'Here, Christina Rossetti describes a positive, stable situation in which the lunar feminine image reflects back the solar warmth of male desire, and where the male, in turn, is as dependent upon the nutritive potential of that image as the baby who "feeds" upon the good breast'.[41] But the artist does not see the woman as she is. It is only his dream perception of her. Bullen likens the artist to Pygmalion, who wanted to create his own image in the woman he sculpts.

That Woolf uses the mirror idea in her lecture which grew into *A Room of One's Own* must be significant. That she suggests the male desire to impose a self-image is important too. She goes on to develop the concept, stating that 'mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action'.[42] For this reason, women must be viewed as inferior because they need to be able to reflect the superiority of men. If you do not see yourself as superior to half the human race, how can you continue to be 'stormed at by shot and shell', how can you acknowledge that 'boldly [we] rode and well'? As Woolf says, 'The looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system'.[43] One further Pre-Raphaelite use of the mirror

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[40] J.D. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 125.
[41] J.D. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 127.
[42] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 36
[43] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 36

image is worth looking at, that of the mirror image as doppelgänger. One example of this is Rossetti's *How They Met Themselves* where the artist paints a mirror image of strolling lovers. Andrew Wilton states that, 'Here the mirror-image of the strolling lovers is a pair of doppelgänger whose appearance presages death. The image presents in narrative form the imagery of "reflected fate"'.[44] This idea can arguably be linked to the fact that, although Mrs Ramsay avoids her image in the mirror, she doesn't avoid the semi-reflective image of the lighthouse beam which 'seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes' (*TL* 74), seeming to hint at Mrs Ramsay's death. Clearly *To the Lighthouse* examines the looking-glass phenomena and arguably reflects on the Pre-Raphaelite pre-occupation with mirrors, for the novel also looks at what happens when the glass is empty. Bullen notes that in Rossetti's poem, 'A Last Confession', 'the narrator, having lost his lover, also loses sight of his own image in a pool, and becomes invisible to those around him'.[45] This statement seems to be relevant to the *Time Passes* section of *To the Lighthouse* where mirror imagery abounds, while the first section of the novel ends symbolically with Mr Ramsay looking at Mrs Ramsay and 'she knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever' (*TL* 142). She knows also that he is demanding that she should tell him that she loves him, but she cannot find the words to do this. Significantly, she turns from the mirrors of the lighthouse that project its beam to him, 'And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew that she loved him' (*TL* 142). Mrs Ramsay has triumphed but said nothing. Her words have all been in the mind of Mr Ramsay. As a sign, she is saying what he requires her to say. Both are satisfied. Yet, Ramsay has used his wife as a looking-glass to reflect his own desires and to support his ego as Woolf had suggested in *A Room of One's Own*. His need for her is great and

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[44] Andrew Wilton, 'Symbolism in Britain' in *The Age of Rosetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860 -1910*, p. 20.

the loss of his wife will inevitably be shown to be devastating; the concept of the mirror becomes a symbol of male dependency on women. It is important to note that Mrs Ramsay as mirror reflects only Mr Ramsay's image of his wife not herself.

While all references to mirrors serve to demonstrate Woolf's debt to the earlier movements, they also act as a clear indication of her belief in progression, for Woolf's use of the mirror in subsequent sections of the novel is very different. In the 'Time Passes' section of the novel images of empty mirrors haunt the paragraphs immediately before and after the death of Mrs Ramsay. The sleeper searching the beach for meaning finds no answers: 'no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul' (*TL* 146). All that remains is a memory of 'how once the looking-glass had held a face' (*TL* 147). The empty space where once there had been a woman's face perhaps suggests the re-defining of the image of woman. It also seems to suggest the artist's problem. It is perhaps questioning whether there can be art without human beings.

Here we must consider, in more detail than before, the impact of Roger Fry. The gap between the Romantic tradition and Modernist ideas, as we have seen, seems to have been at least in part bridged for Woolf by the aesthetic concepts of Fry. Fry's influence on Bloomsbury is established and is well catalogued.[46] That he brought Bloomsbury into contact with European painters and made them more consciously aware of Modern aesthetic theory has already been touched upon. More specifically, his influence on *To the Lighthouse* was profound.

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[45] J.D. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 124.
[46] Richard Shone in *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and their Circle*. This gives a very clear account of Fry's involvement.

Woolf's biography of Roger Fry notes his impact on the public of 1910 and on their immediate group.[47] By 1910, Fry was an established critic of painting. He had written articles on important artists working in Britain. He was, for instance, critical of Whistler whom he felt was basically impressionist,[48] and treated his sitters 'with an almost inhuman detachment',[49] while he saw Watts as Victorian: 'There was the primness and respectability of early Victorian life; he painted one portrait that might pass for the work of any of the nameless dullards of the period'.[50] However, Fry did not merely dismiss the works of these painters, he used them to redefine his own ideas on art in much the same way that Woolf learnt to use the Edwardian novelists and, in *To the Lighthouse*, the late Romantic ideas. It was through the examination of what Whistler and Watts neglected that Fry established his own theories. Whistler seemed cold to Fry because of his lack of poetic vision;[51] Watts's work, Fry noted, grew out of Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth and Keats and such a 'rekindling of the poetic sense as made the grandiose no longer seem a dangerous affectation',[52] yet his work lacked truly expressive qualities that Fry demanded of 'good' art.

Of Whistler, Fry stated:

> Whistler ... worked on the assumption that beauty existed in & for itself. He believed that design meant a perfectly harmonized pattern, that certain colour combinations pleased the eye more intensely than others. He refused to see that the mere beauty of a pattern could be heightened if it were at once a pattern and a drama, that the chord of colour would vibrate more richly to the eye if at the same time it woke an echo in the imagination. For him a picture was a flattened-out porcelain jar, in which we look primarily for the highest and

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[47] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry*, pp. 44 - 66.
[48] Roger Fry, 'Watts & Whistler' (April 1905) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1996), p. 30.
[49] Roger Fry , 'Mr Whistler' (July 1903) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 22.
[50] Roger Fry, 'Watts & Whistler', p. 33.
[51] Roger Fry, 'Mr Whistler', pp. 22-3.
[52] Roger Fry, 'Watts & Whistler', p. 32.

> most subtle stimulus to a sense of sight, trained by long apprenticeship to appreciate the most delicate perfections of quality.[53]

This passage is interesting for what it tells us of Fry's own beliefs of what was important in painting. For Fry, a painting must be 'at once a pattern and a drama'. He talks of the 'chord of colour' with its ability to 'vibrate' and to awaken 'an echo in the imagination'. In all of these descriptions, Fry is borrowing language from other arts to describe the effects he feels ought to be produced by a painting. It is not so much as a criticism of Whistler's painting that the above passage is enlightening, but as an indication of the path that Fry's own thinking would eventually take. That Fry was acknowledging what he sees as the failure of these movements does not make them any less significant to his aesthetic theories. It did not, for example, prevent him from toying with the ideas of these artists and experimenting with their emblems. The Omega Workshops experimented with the lily emblem of the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris.[54] Fry's writing on the Post-Impressionists alludes to the Pre-Raphaelites and the movements that grew out of this movement.[55] In discarding the aesthetic theories of these groups, Fry was rejecting a way of life but not ignoring it. It needed to be evaluated and eliminated from the inquiry, and a similar kind of rejection was to be of real importance to Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*. (For Woolf, as has been mentioned, the aesthetic struggle was also linked to a much greater personal battle with the memories she had of her parents.) Musical, literary and increasingly dramatic analogies would all form a part of Fry's critical analysis of painting and such terms would be transposed into Virginia Woolf's criticism of literature and would inform her theories of her own art.

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[53] Roger Fry, 'Watts & Whistler', p. 28.
[54] S. K. Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism*, p. 61.
[55] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery I' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 86; also 'Architecture and the Decorative Arts' in the same, pp174-5.

The deployment of language and ideas from other art fields in Fry's criticism must now be examined. Writing in the catalogue for *Manet and the Post-Impressionist* in 1910, Fry describes Matisse's 'search for an abstract harmony of line, for rhythm',[56] introducing precise musical terms to the analysis of painting. The desire to identify a musical quality in painting becomes part of what Fry calls in 'The Grafton Gallery I' of 19th November 1910 the 'revolt against the photographic vision of the nineteenth century'.[57] This would give way to Fry's fight 'to discover the visual language of the imagination'.[58] Fry's criticism from this point onwards is more interested in finding connections between the arts. In doing this he is exploring, in a much more radical way, the idea of synaesthesia that had attracted the Pre-Raphaelites and their successors.

Fry had noted in *The Grafton Gallery I* that primitive design was necessary 'if art is to regain its power to express emotional ideas'.[59] In a similar way, Woolf was, by the mid 1920s, trying to achieve in literature a form and style that would allow her to examine and express emotional ideas. This is why she has to acknowledge that the traditional Victorian and Edwardian methods and the more adventurous but equally flawed attempts of the Pre-Raphaelites and their successors must be abandoned. It is very probably Fry's ideas that provide her with some answers. Woolf's exploration of the complexities of Modernism in *To the Lighthouse* involves a close examination of past and contemporary painting and its critical theory, and she considers the vital importance of musical technique and vocabulary in an examination of these ideas. Here, her ideas follow the pattern of Fry's much earlier thinking. She examines her own and literature's Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist inheritance acknowledges Impressionism, but sides firmly with the

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[56] Roger Fry, 'The Post Impressionists' (1910) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 84.
[57] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery I' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 86.
[58] Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism' (May 1911) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 100.
[59] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery I' (November 1910) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 86.

Post-Impressionists and, in so doing, works to establish a new critical idiom on which to found her ideas. Fry felt that the work of the Post-Impressionists represented 'the most successful attempt to go behind the too elaborate apparatus which the Renaissance established in painting'.[60] It can be no coincidence that the ten years' time span of *To the Lighthouse* takes in the years when Fry was working hard to establish Post-Impressionism in Britain, and was turning increasingly to music for the answers. In an echoing movement we must pass with Woolf from Mrs Ramsay, who is the focus of attention in the first section of the novel, through the transition period when the mirror was empty, to Lily Briscoe the artist who, in surviving Mrs Ramsay, becomes our hope for answers. The symbol of Mrs Ramsay has failed us. We look to Lily to provide answers, and it is significant that she is an artist. It is also significant that in the first part of the novel she could not find the words to explain the 'triangular purple shape' (*TL* 61) that represents Mrs Ramsay and her son to William Bankes.

Indeed for Woolf, mere symbolism is not enough. In the letter of May 27th 1927 to Roger Fry, Woolf states

> I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions ... I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalized way.[61]

Fry had noted, in 1905, in Watts, 'Symbolism is, as a rule, of broad universal acceptance; it belongs to our popular mythology ... Most of Watts's allegories readily yield nearly all their pictorial and imaginative significance'.[62] In her

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[60] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery I', p. 86.
[61] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 385. Fry had written to her saying, 'I'm sure that there's lots I haven't understood ... for instance, that arriving at the Lighthouse has a symbolic meaning which escapes me'.
[62] Roger Fry, 'Watts & Whistler' (April 1905) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 34.

interpretation of symbolism in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf seems to be moving away from this predictable use of symbols. In fact, in *To the Lighthouse* with the character roaming the beach, we constantly search for the answers. Traditional symbols, which litter the first half and are smashed with the mirror during the second section when the Persephone-like Prue is destroyed without reprieve, have been undermined. How do they help us to interpret our world or the work of art, Woolf seems to be asking. Traditional symbolism cannot capture the Modern message. The purely visual will not work; it requires an addition. The novel which initially seems to be about Mrs Ramsay is, in fact, about Lily's search for an understanding of form, rhythm and meaning that goes beyond symbolism.

Again it is useful to turn to Fry, for his interest was primarily in form. In 'The Post Impressionists II', published in *The Nation* in December 1910, Fry considers the opposite forces of Classicism and Romanticism noted in the section on *Jacob's Room*. Fry describes Cézanne as Classical supporting Maurice Denis. What is interesting here is, once again, not necessarily what Fry was saying (which could be said to be a Romantic interpretation of classical ideas),[63] but the terminology which Fry uses to describe the work, for he states that Cézanne 'concentrated his imagination so intensely upon certain oppositions of tone and colour that he became able to build up and, as it were, recreate form from within'.[64] Van Gogh, he asserts, is Romantic, 'his imagination responds to the call of the wildest adventures of the spirit',[65] while Matisse is 'gifted with a quite exceptional sense of pure beauty - beauty of rhythm, of colour harmony, of pure design'.[66] It is interesting that as Fry

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[63] Jane Goldman in *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 129, states that Fry's ideas are a mixture of the Romantic ideas of Julius Meier-Graefe and those of Denis. She says that, 'The formal, abstract qualities associated with the classical interpretation of Cézanne, were not enhanced by the romantic context provided by Fry'.

[64] Roger Fry, 'The Post Impressionists II' (December 1910) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 91.

[65] Roger Fry, 'The Post Impressionists II', p. 91.

[66] Roger Fry, 'The Post Impressionists II', p. 93.

becomes more enthusiastic about a piece, the musical vocabulary slips in. Fry closed *Manet and the Post Impressionists* with a lecture which stated that its aim was 'to discover the visual language of the imagination'.[67] What follows provides one of the clearest links between the painter and musician. Fry stated that it was the challenge of the artist:

> To discover ... what arrangements of forms and colour are calculated to stir the imagination most deeply through the stimulus given to the sense of sight. This is exactly analogous to the problem of music, which is to find what arrangements of sound will have the greatest evocative power. But whereas in music the world of natural sound is so vague, so limited, and takes, on the whole, so small a part of our imaginative life, that it needs no special attention or study on the part of the musician, in painting and sculpture, on the contrary, the actual world of nature is so full of sights which appeal to our imaginations - so that a part of our inner and contemplative life is carried on by means of visual images, that this natural world of sights calls for a constant and vivid apprehension on the part of the artist.[68]

Certainly, Woolf seems to be looking at the problems of what will stir the imagination through the stimulus given to sight. For Mrs Ramsay, it seems to be linked with the lighthouse's beam of light which, in chapter 11 of the first section, so impinges on her thoughts, allowing her to travel in her mind. She feels that the beam is the visual representation of herself, much more so than the image in the mirror which arguably represents whatever her husband desires it to represent. She has in some respects homed in on an abstract image to represent herself. However, Mrs Ramsay's idea of herself is linked not just to sight (it is not really symbolic in the true sense of the word), but also to sound qualities, because the image is part of a sequence through which the beam of light, 'the long steady stroke ... which was her stroke' (*TL* 73),

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[67] Roger Fry, ' Post Impressionism', p. 100.
[68] Roger Fry, ' Post Impressionism', pp. 100-101.

becomes identifiably hers only as it forms part of the sequence, part of the rhythm. Fry suggests that 'particular rhythms of line and particular harmonies of colour have their spiritual correspondences'.[69] This is, indeed, the implication in chapter 11 of the first section because, for Mrs Ramsay, the combination of the image of lighthouse beam and the rhythm that the stroke of its line creates seems to set off within her a desire to imitate the beam through its rhythm. This, in turn, leads her to state 'We are in the hands of the lord' (*TL* 74), a literally spiritual response which she makes involuntarily and against her judgement. Similar experiences can be seen in the dinner party section and the poetry at the end of section one. Mrs Ramsay seems intuitively to be sensing something that Lily is trying to achieve in her painting.

Lily is trying to represent Mrs Ramsay's essence. In the first section of the novel she depicts her as the 'wedge shape' which William Bankes finds so difficult to interpret. Woolf's painter is here following Fry's maxim that 'if ... the given idea is merely a wild animal attacking a man ... all that is necessary is the expression of ferocity and wildness'.[70] Nevertheless, Lily's idea is still merely an image, a shape, and as such it cannot communicate her ideas in a satisfactory way. Fry continues, 'there is no immediate obvious reason why the artist should represent actual things at all, why he should not have a music of line and colour. ... We may get, in fact, from mere pattern, if it be really noble in design and vital in execution, intense aesthetic pleasure'.[71] This idea seems relevant to the eventual success of Lily's painting and to Woolf's artistic purpose in the novel. Fry continues, 'rhythm is the fundamental and vital quality of painting, as of <u>all the arts</u> - representation is secondary to that, and must never encroach on the ultimate and fundamental aims of rhythm'.[72] And this of course foretells Lily's eventual solution.

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[69] Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism', p. 105.
[70] Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism', p. 103.
[71] Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism', p. 105.
[72] Roger Fry, 'Post Impressionism', pp. 105-6 (my underlining).

It is surely not a coincidence that in a novel that she felt she should have dedicated to Roger Fry,[73] Woolf introduces as one of the main characters an artist struggling to express a vision of life in a medium that is unfamiliar to contemporary society. Lily Briscoe is in many ways not just a painter but a visual embodiment of the Modern problem. In 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia' of 1912, Fry had criticized art critics who desired to be consoled by beauty. Such critics had dismissed the Grafton Gallery exhibits as ugly. Fry argues that this assessment was based on a desire to describe things as beautiful when they are merely familiar or easy to interpret.[74] It is not only Lily's painting that characters like Bankes and Ramsay misinterpret. There is a general misinterpretation of Lily herself, based on the fact that she is not beautiful and refuses to conform to the social norms of marriage and motherhood. Unlike Mrs Ramsay, Lily won't readily conform to a symbolic interpretation by the male characters. They frequently dismiss her for her lack of conventional beauty in much the same way that Post-Impressionist paintings were dismissed by visitors to the Grafton Gallery in 1910. However, Lily is keen to remove herself from the traditionally female world. She acknowledges its allure, but rejects Mrs Ramsay's attempts at match-making and, during the dinner party, resents Mrs Ramsay's demand that she should take on the traditional female role and massage Tansley's ego. The difference between Mrs Ramsay and Lily is an important part of this novel which we initially think will be about the former, but which turns out to be very much Lily's property. The novel is really very much about Lily's need to create and

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[73] On 27th May 1927, Virginia Woolf wrote to Roger Fry, 'I am immensely glad that you like Lighthouse. Now I wish I had dedicated it to you,' in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 385. This comment and subsequent discussion in the rest of this letter seem to acknowledge Woolf's growing debt to Fry. She comments in the same letter, 'the whole process of writing remains to me a complete mystery; the only thing I realize is that at last, for some reason, I am beginning to write easily, which may be a sign of decay, of course. I turn to your essays to find out', p. 386. The fact that she was unable to read Roger Fry's essays at this point because as she points out rather playfully, 'some one [had] stolen them', p. 386, does not alter the fact that Woolf is suggesting that Fry's theories were important to her when she was writing this novel.

[74] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia' (November 1912) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 113.

to find a form of expression through the medium of a Post-Impressionist art. Expression in her painting is marked by a desire to find what Fry termed 'organic unity in a work of art, as opposed to that search for casual and factual unity'.[75] Like Woolf, whose quest was similar, Lily turns to a combination of the arts for the answers.

The creation of Lily's painting spans the whole novel. The process of painting is made more difficult for Lily in the first section of the novel, in part by the fact that the style she is using is unfamiliar to those who take an interest in her work, and also because Lily is aware of the importance of design. She can imagine what she wants to paint but cannot make it happen. Writing about the Futurist Movement in March 1912, Fry had stated prophetically:

> One result of these efforts stands out as having some possibilities for the future of pictorial design, namely, the effort to prove that it is not necessary that the images of a picture should have any fixed spatial relation to one another except that dictated by the needs of pure design.[76]

Woolf clearly presents Lily as a Post-Impressionist as can be seen in her rejection of Impressionism. She will not see things as 'semi-transparent' (*TL* 23), but sees vibrant colours and notes 'beneath the colour there was shape' (*TL* 23). This is the problem and it makes 'this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child' (*TL* 23). Throughout the first section of the novel, Lily is haunted by feelings of inadequacy which concern not just her painting but her existence. It is Mrs Ramsay's desire that Lily should marry William Bankes. Lily herself is against the cult of marriage and yet as she looks at Mrs Ramsay and her world, she has to acknowledge that it is attractive. Combined with the feeling that 'it [her painting] was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad' (*TL* 56), such feelings render her unable to create. In

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[75] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia', p. 113.
[76] Roger Fry, 'The Futurists' (March 1912) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 146.

order to be able to create, Lily must be expressing her own ideas. The lure of Impressionism is still great, 'the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherealized' (*TL* 56), but the result would not bear any resemblance to her vision because 'she saw the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral' (*TL* 56-7). It is the language in which Woolf states Lily's vision that is interesting here. The words 'framework' and 'arches' suggest architecture, an idea which Woolf had used in *The Voyage Out* and which was to be of much greater importance in *The Waves*. Lily seems to be embracing a Classical bias in her evolving theory of art. This was an idea which Fry had looked at on many occasions between 1910 and 1915. It is worth remembering that in 'Blake and British Art' of February 1914, Fry had defined the classical theory as a belief 'that the essence of art lies in form and the emotions which that arouses'.[77] In Lily's painting, it is not the individual images that matter. Lily's presentation of Mrs Ramsay has been looked at earlier, when 'It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left' (*TL* 62). Again, the language is architectural and again, Fry seems relevant. In writing about Kandinsky in another article, 'The Allied Artists', in August 1914, Fry had stated that 'the forms and colours have no possible justification, except the rightness of their relations'.[78] This would seem to be the kind of idea that Woolf explores through the creation of Lily Briscoe.

It is important to note what is missing from Lily's assessment of painting in the first section of the novel. She makes no mention of rhythm or of musical analogies. Fry had acknowledged the part that both these things had to play in the creation of new modes of painting. Describing Matisse's *Dance* in 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia' of 1912, he had stated, 'the rhythm is at once so persuasive and so intense that figures that pass in front of it seem to

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[77] Roger Fry, 'Blake and British Art' (February 1914) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 157.
[78] Roger Fry, 'The Allied Artists' (August 1913) in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 152.

become part of the rhythmic whole. The rhythm passes out of the picture and imposes itself on the surroundings'.[79] In the same piece he had described 'the abstract and musical quality of [Picasso's] designs'.[80] Conversely, in response to the publication of Clive Bell's *Art* in March 1914, Fry had begun to look at the place of the literary arts in a theory of the visual arts and had stated, 'I wish he [Bell] had extended his theory, and taken literature ... into consideration, for I feel confident that great poetry arouses aesthetic emotion of a similar kind to painting and architecture'.[81] What Fry goes on to isolate as the connection is the rhythm, for as he states:

> Since, if in words images may be evoked in such an order, as to arouse aesthetic emotion, there is no apparent reason why images may not be similarly evoked by painting having formal relation.[82]

Arguably, Woolf deliberately excludes specific musical analogy from Lily's theory of painting in the first section to demonstrate its significance when it offers a solution to the problem in the final section. In the third section, Lily is still confronted by the 'white and uncompromising' (*TL* 178) canvas, and to begin with she feels just as inadequate as she did ten years earlier. She is like Mrs Ramsay at the beginning of the dinner party, as she looks at the people who are sitting round the table and notes, 'Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her' (*TL* 96). Mrs Ramsay, who has come to represent an older, increasingly obsolete way of life, is limited to moments of domestic triumph whereas Lily is aspiring to compete in a man's world. In the third section, the absence of Mrs Ramsay leaves Lily to fill the void. It is the way in which Lily's acts of marking the canvas are recorded that is of interest here:

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[79] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 114.
[80] Roger Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery: An Apologia', p. 116.
[81] Roger Fry, 'A New Theory of Art' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 159.
[82] Roger Fry, 'A New Theory of Art', p. 159.

> She made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it - a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running lines ... they enclosed ... a space. (*TL* 179)

It must be said first of all that the passage refers to the act of creation, not to the finished painting. However, the attention paid to the rhythm here is very marked. By adopting or adapting to a rhythm, Lily is able to create. Even more significant is the actual rhythm that she adopts. The first four sentences of the passage quoted above establish not a casual attention to rhythm, but a specific rhythm, and one that has been established previously in the novel. It is a 'one, two, three' rhythm, a triple time rhythm, or the rhythm that Mrs Ramsay tunes herself to when she realizes that she must join the disparate forces at the dinner party and:

> giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking - one, two, three, one, two, three. And so on and so on, she repeated, listening to it, sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper (*TL* 96-7).

For Lily, the rhythm is associated with dancing, while every movement becomes related one to the next and the description takes on the quality of a description of music. This is again not unlike the presentation of the dinner party where the method used for describing the section demand musical, or at least rhythmic, analogies. Further descriptions of Lily's act of painting compound the musical connections:

> It was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her ... by what she saw ... this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance ... her mind kept throwing up from its depth, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space (*TL* 181).

This is another lengthy quotation, but it is worth analysis, not least because the prose Woolf is using to describe Lily's experience here seems, itself, to be picking up the rhythm that Lily is describing. It is also describing transcendental experience in that Lily loses sight of herself in the hypnotic execution of moves dictated to her by the painting. This is not unlike the experience of Mrs Ramsay as she watched the lighthouse beam, and like the experience of the characters at the dinner party while lulled by the soporific chanting of the poetry.

Although it may not form part of Lily's painting theory in the first section of the novel, rhythm is something that is constantly alluded to there, and Woolf is embellishing ideas that she had explored in her earlier novels. For Mrs Ramsay, the everyday rhythms of life represent security, 'domesticity triumphed; custom crooned its soothing rhythm' (*TL* 37). Beyond this is the rhythm of the waves which can be comforting because it 'seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song' (*TL* 19) but which can also resemble, 'a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat[ing] the measure of life' (*TL* 19). It is ultimately rhythm that allows Lily to communicate through art. Woolf's interest in the different powers of rhythm is more comprehensive in this novel than in any of her earlier works, and again, it is Fry's writings that seem to have been influential.

In 1920, Roger Fry was translating Stephane Mallarmé's poems. In August of that year, Woolf wrote to Fry:

> I think the translations are extremely interesting - also very difficult. The difficulty may be partly that I've left my copy in London, and thus can't compare them with the French. But I've no doubt at all that they're very good, and give one the same strange feeling as he does. We are inclined to think notes essential, and also a few pages by you on Mallarmé would make all the difference, and be of the greatest interest.[83]

This extract suggests that the Hogarth Press was planning to publish Fry's translations. In October 1922, they were still waiting for the finished version. Trying to spur Fry into action, Woolf wrote to him, 'I may point out that we've sold several copies of Mallarmé by Roger Fry'.[84] The poems were actually not published until 1936 a year after Fry's death.[85] However, Fry's 'few pages' on Mallarmé were written in 1921 and make interesting reading, since clearly, Woolf was aware of Fry's thinking on Mallarmé while she was writing her most successful novels. For Fry, Mallarmé's work demonstrated 'the nature of pure poetic form'[86] more emphatically than that of any other poet. Fry's introduction attempts to describe what this means. His discussion begins, 'Every word carries with it an image or an idea surrounded by a vague aura of associations'.[87] He continues:

> When a word is apprehended, then, this aura takes shape in the mind, and when a second word is joined to the first (as for instance in apposition, or as an adjective to a noun) this changes the aura of the first word, expanding, contracting or colouring it as the case may be. ...

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[83] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 439.
[84] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 565.
[85] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 439.
[86] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 297.
[87] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 297.

> The essence of poetry ... seems to be to use words in such a way that they attain the maximum evocative energy. The poet so arranges words that each word shall have as full, as rich, as completely visible an aura as possible, and that the changes which each word makes in the aural complex shall have such a rhythm that as we proceed each change tends to become more and more significant.[88]

Once again, Fry presents his audience with a conglomeration of terms from painting, literature and music. He gives examples, the use of the word 'daughter' in *King Lear* and a line from Gray's *Elegy*, and he seems to be suggesting that words have the aura that they produce when we initially think of them in isolation and the aura that they acquire as they are used and re-used in the piece of literature. He states, 'a word may make a sudden change, but the change must be rhythmically related to the sequence of preceding changes'.[89] Fry talks of language that is consciously used for poetic effect, noting that 'the complex of word images and their associations tend to set up vibrations which continue in the mind'.[90] It is noteworthy that Fry turns from rhythm to music and the quality of sound created by the spoken word, and he states, 'where verse is employed for poetical ends, beauty of sound may not only not be impertinent, but may greatly heighten the effect of the words by producing a rich vague emotional state in harmony with expression'.[91] It seems to be clear that in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf is looking at a similar sort of theory and it is worth exploring this. She would explore such issues further in the essays, 'Craftmanship' and 'Letter to a Young Poet', published later. It is also worth mentioning Eliot's essay 'The Music of Poetry' written in

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[88] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, pp. 297 - 8.
[89] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 298.
[90] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 300.
[91] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 300.

1942.[92] With Fry's work, these demonstrate a growing interest in poetry as music in words during the Modern period.

Woolf's interest in the power of poetry and its musical association was apparent earlier on. In *Mrs Dalloway* echoes of Shakespeare's plays are used for their poetic and musical ability to evoke the emotions they initiate in the original work. They seem to be a development of the musical leitmotif so it is important to look at what Woolf does with the poetry of other writers in *To the Lighthouse*. She is using four poems: Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', 'Luriana Lurilee', Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 98' and Cowper's 'Castaway'. The choice is crucial. They are all poems where sound and word aura are important, in order to explore the emotional reaction evoked by the combination of sound, image and word. I also think it possible that she is perhaps evoking memories of another of Tennyson's poems, 'The Lady of Shalott' in the prose and this will be explored later.[93]

It is important to define poetry as music in words in Woolf's writing, and this music tells us much about the attitudes of those who hear it. For Mr Ramsay, the words of Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* have acquired great significance. They provide a music which arguably allows him to function. For Ramsay the words 'Stormed at by shot and shell' (*TL* 20) confirm his hold on life. He is as soothed by this as Mrs Ramsay is soothed by the rhythm of life. Later, the repeated 'Someone had blundered!' (*TL* 22, 30) becomes not just representative of the actions of the commanders of whom Tennyson was writing, but also denotes the sense of failure in Ramsay's own life. The harsh sibilance of the first quotation and the power of the word

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[92] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry' in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), pp. 26 – 39.

[93] The Lady of Shalott was an important subject for the Pre-Raphaelites. Christine Poulson writes about this in 'Death and the Maiden: The Lady of Shalott and the Pre-Raphaelites,' in *Re-Framing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Ellen Harding (Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 173 – 191. It is also the subject of a chapter in Lynne Pearce's *Woman, Image, Text:*

'blundered' created by the combination of b and d sounds in the second epitomize the brutal male world that Mr Ramsay represents. He has attuned himself to such brutal music. It confirms his superiority and his knowledge of his need for sympathy and provides licence for his calls to shatter the apparent tranquillity of the scene. Yet on occasions when said 'melodiously' (*TL* 39), the words sound ridiculous. Woolf uses the adverb as another way of ridiculing male society.

Ramsay's second recitation comes at the end of the dinner party and for Mrs Ramsay and the guests it has a very different effect. It seems to unite them. For Mrs Ramsay, however, the words of the poem are not associated with her husband and indeed the poem's recital is concluded by another character, Augustus Carmichael, another character whom others find it difficult to understand and significantly, the character who publishes poetry. To Mrs Ramsay, listening to the words of the poem, it is 'as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves' (*TL* 127). The imagery of the poem is largely natural and incorporates some of the symbols of Pre-Raphaelitism. For Mrs Ramsay it seems to say what she had been wanting to say all evening and 'like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she had said different things' (*TL* 127). Later, the words of the poem return to Mrs Ramsay and 'began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights ... lit up in the dark of her mind, and seemed ... to cry out and to be echoed' (*TL* 136-7). This is in fact both a visual and musical reminder of several other passages used in the novel which mention small lights. Motivated by the combination of words and sounds in the poem, Mrs Ramsay reads at random from a book of poetry which lulls her into a semi-trance-like state, where she

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*Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (New York, London & Hertfordshire: Harvester

is able to respond to the words of Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 98' which she comes to see in its entirety: 'And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here' (*TL* 139). What is described here is the significance of shape and structure and the musical quality of the poetry appeals to the sense of rhythm within Mrs Ramsay: 'Her mind was still going up and down, up and down with the poetry' (*TL* 140), while her husband is still invigorated by his reading of Scott. For Mrs Ramsay, the poetry she reads allows her to subsume her own desires and submit to her husband without loss to herself at the end of the first section.

Mr Ramsay is of course attracted to poetry that tells of man's fight against the odds. In the third section of the novel, Ramsay is reciting from Cowper's 'The Castaway', and again Woolf's choice of poem is significant. The sonnet in which his wife had seen the 'essence sucked out of life' had a rhythm, but it was a subtle rhythm. Mr Ramsay's choice of poetry incorporates bold, imposing rhythms. Her poem tells her about life and he again chooses ones which describe male struggle and hardship. 'But I beneath a rougher sea / Was whelmed in deeper gulfs than he' (*TL* 189) and culminates in 'We perished, each alone'. Ramsay's choice of poetry symbolizes in its words and in its rhythm his desire to attract sympathy and to impose himself on others. As they sit in the boat at the end of the second section, Cam and James are waiting for his demanding cry and it is significant that it doesn't come. For the first time, Mr Ramsay thinks of others and asks the children to bring the parcels. This seems to encapsulate the change in the Modern word.

In his introduction to the Mallarmé's poems, Fry considers whether the 'melody of sound' was 'the most essential and fundamental characteristic of

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Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 71 – 84.

poetry'.[94] He concludes that the 'word image-complex' is the most fundamental part of poetry and that the melody is 'a physiological aid to poetic apprehension'.[95] This is because he recognizes the importance of understanding the impact of the words, and doubts that the musical effect can ever be anything but secondary to that. The same is true in Woolf's novel where, although the rhythm and sound of the words are important, they are only important in so far as they heighten a character's sensitivity to and powers of what Fry called 'esthetic perception'.[96] Ultimately, the words are most important, and each character is attracted to poems which show something of their ways and outlooks on life.

Fry notes as characteristic of Mallarmé's work the desire to 'bring out all the cross-correspondences and interpenetrations of the verbal images. To do this it is often necessary to bring words into closer opposition than the ordinary statement would allow.'[97] He describes how Mallarmé's poetry starts 'vibrations in the mind whose overtones ring through planes of thought and feeling quite remote from those with which the poem is ostensibly concerned'.[98] Again, Woolf is describing a similar response in her characters. However, the idea is more deeply explored within this novel. *To the Lighthouse* seems, on occasions, to offer echoes of another of Tennyson's poems, 'The Lady of Shalott'. The 'whitening' trees in the second page of the novel offer the first hint of a connection. Mrs Ramsay is knitting, which recalls the web woven by the Lady of Shalott. Mirrors are important. In section 11 of the first part, as Mrs Ramsay is alone and bathed in solitude, so the rhythm of the prose steps up its triplet effect, an effect that can be heard in Tennyson's poem (*TL* 73-75). Mrs Ramsay is at this point experiencing a solitude like the

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[94] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 300.
[95] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', pp. 300 -1.
[96] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 301
[97] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 303
[98] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 304

Lady of Shalott and it is the everyday things that remove her from this state, so 'she stopped knitting; she held the long reddish-brown stocking dangling in her hands a moment. She saw the light again' (*TL* 75). Rhythmically, this is not unlike the section of Tennyson's poem: 'She left the web she left the loom, she made three paces through the room ' and which ends 'she looked down to Camelot.' These tentative links of the first section arguably gather momentum in the 'Time Passes' section of the novel where 'the mirror was broken' (*TL* 153). It seems impossible not to associate this with Tennyson's 'the mirror crack'd from side to side'.[99] Coming at a moment of cataclysmic horror when hope seems shattered, this phrase gains in resonance by association with the earlier story, and the words 'whatever the dreamers dreamt holily' (*TL* 162) compound this effect. In a novel which is looking very penetratingly at the obsolescence of Victorian ideas, Woolf's use of associative language has impact, the impact of a musical leitmotif. The absence of such references in the third section of the novel bears testimony to the end of a way of life. Such allusions were used by T. S. Eliot, while Fry felt that Mallarmé had 'anticipated by many years the method of some Cubist painters',[100] and Woolf seems to have been influenced by such ideas.

Fry stated that 'with Mallarmé the theme is frequently as it were broken into pieces in the process of poetical analysis, and is reconstructed, not according to the relations of experience but of pure poetical necessity'.[101] Woolf's method is similarly fragmentary. We know that there is a house on an island, and that the house has a garden with red-hot pokers, a hedge and other flowers, all suggesting civilization. We know that there is sea and a lighthouse; however, there are relatively few prolonged passages of description. Woolf denies the reader close geographical detail . What we have

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[99] A. Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, ed. T. Herbert Warren (London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 28.
[100] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 303.

is very close to what Fry described in his article on 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', written in 1911, as 'a few elementary rectangular masses, placed in certain relations to one another and illuminated by a diagonal light'.[102] Fry had said that Craig recognized that such a stage set would 'stir the mind to the highest pitch of anticipation'.[103] At the beginning of the essay Fry describes the need for a setting that would 'actually impose upon the spectator the appropriate mood'.[104] In Craig's set design, Fry finds evidence of a set that is able to express the ideas of the play. Woolf's setting for *To the Lighthouse* offers a similar effect. The house represents Mrs Ramsay's domesticity and the security that it provides, while the island and the waters that give it definition signify the mental isolation of the characters and their existence on the borders of chaos. Just as Gordon Craig had, according to Fry, 'purified [his designs] of any trace of the old picturesque conceptions of scenery',[105] so Woolf in her novel never uses setting as merely picturesque detail. Setting is important only in so far as it combines with word and sound to add to what I want to call the 'dramatic' significance of the novel.

The theatrical quality of *To the Lighthouse* is worth defining because it is something that grows out of Woolf's interest in a combination of sound, image, word and movement. That the setting has a theatrical quality has already been looked at, but the debt of this novel and *The Waves* to the theatre, I think, goes further. The use of the frame to create pictures has been established as a facet of *To the Lighthouse*'s Pre-Raphaelite heritage. However, it could be said that these frames provide the boundaries not just for a picture, but for the movements of characters in action: they form, in fact, a proscenium arch. It should be remembered that as she sits for Lily's picture,

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[101] Roger Fry, 'An Early Introduction to translations of Mallarmé', p. 303.
[102] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 288.
[103] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', p. 288.
[104] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', p. 287.
[105] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', p. 287.

Mrs Ramsay has to remind herself to sit still, to keep 'her head as much in the same position as possible' (*TL* 21). The picture fails to capture the human being unless motion is involved and there can be no movement in realist or Pre-Raphaelite pictures or portraits. That Lily's portrait is about movement and rhythm is one of the central revelations of the third section. Fry says of Craig's stage sets, 'since it is the business of the scene to arouse only a vague indeterminate mood of wonder and awe, the precise colour and content of the mood, the exact shade of each emotion, awaits the action for its complete realization'.[106] Woolf's characters move around their very specific areas of the stage set. Through their movements and the communications that they make with others they create a drama. This is illuminated by the sun and by the lighthouse beam and figuratively by the eye beams of the characters. It is also interesting to note that at the time that Woolf was writing this novel, she was also thinking about another art form that depended on the projection of light. The emergence of cinematography and its function as an art form is discussed in a 1926 essay, 'The Cinema'. Here, Woolf noted that 'the most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain'. [107] It is an idea that can be glimpsed in *To the Lighthouse* but which will be used more consciously in *The Years*. In *To the Lighthouse*, the theatre is more apparent.

Diagonal lights form an important feature of this novel. The constant references to beams of light adds to the theatrical impression created in *To the Lighthouse*. Fry had mentioned that the setting on the stage was 'illuminated by a diagonal light'.[108] As Mrs Ramsay discovers that the sock she is knitting is too short, Woolf states, 'Bitter and black, half way down in the darkness, in the shaft which ran from sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear formed' (*TL* 34).

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[106] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', p. 288
[107] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' (1926) in *Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, p. 272.
[108] Roger Fry, 'Mr Gordon Craig's Stage Designs', p. 288.

This is one of the first instances of a light beam being used to focus attention and here it is on the emotion felt by Mrs Ramsay. References to beams recur, highlighting moments of emotional intensity and understanding. Lily, standing with William Bankes, looks at Mrs Ramsay: 'looking along his beam she added to it her different ray' (*TL* 57), and as Lily follows Bankes's eye beam so he diverts his attention to her picture thus illuminating this. Eventually, this image is compounded into the lighthouse beam, a moving sweeping light, momentarily illuminating the characters. It is with the longest of these strokes that Mrs Ramsay identifies: 'she looked out to meet that stroke' (*TL* 73) and 'it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes' (*TL* 75). Large beams of light and fixed eye beams become associated with introspection and invasion respectively. This is why when Mrs Ramsay realizes that her husband has been looking at her as she has been thinking, she immediately turns from the beams of the lighthouse and his eyes to the less penetrating lights of the town which are described as 'rippling' and as a 'phantom net' (*TL* 79), unlike the other searching spotlights which impose isolation whether pleasant or unpleasant.

The effects of light are also looked at during the dinner party section where the eight candles have the opposite effect of unifying the group 'the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table' (*TL* 112). They become a group acting together. Lily compares this with other important moments like the one on the tennis lawn: 'and now the same effect was got by the many candles in the sparsely furnished room, and the uncurtained windows, and the bright mask-like look of faces seen by candlelight. Some weight was taken off them' (*TL* 113). Later in this section, the children's faces are again described as 'hoarded behind those rather set, still, mask-like faces' (*TL* 125-6). These images place us firmly in the world of theatre

while perhaps the ability to use beams of light in a panoramic way suggests the cinema.

The lights continue to illuminate the empty stage in the second section of the novel. Here, Woolf's novel does seem to mirror cinematographical technique in its ability to contract time and focus on a scene which is devoid of human beings. In this section the actors are the personified airs which mount the staircase: 'some random light directing them from some uncovered star, or wandering ship, or the lighthouse even' (*TL* 144), and later the 'light bent to its own image in adoration on the bedroom walls' (*TL* 148). The light on the empty set gives the set something of an anticipatory nature. It awaits further action: 'light turned on the wall [and] its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence this indifference ... the thud of something falling' (*TL* 152). During the war it is the absence of light that is noticed and the house is 'pierced by no light of reason' (*TL* 153) and this is coupled with the imagery of the eyeless flowers (*TL* 154). When light faintly returns, it is Mrs Ramsay who is in the spotlight again as Mrs McNab remembers her: 'She could see her now, stooping over her flowers; (and faint and flickering like a yellow beam or a circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall)' (*TL* 156), so Mrs Ramsay seems to have become part of the spotlight's beam; another image of the cinema. A similar image is used of Mr Ramsay as Mrs McNab thinks of him, and 'the telescope fitted itself to Mrs McNab's eyes, and in a ring of light she saw the old gentleman, lean as a rake, wagging his head' (*TL* 159). It serves to emphasize their place in the past. Woolf had noted the ability of film to project a past world when she had said: 'We are beholding a world which has gone under the waves'.[109]

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[109] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' (1926) in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, p. 269.

That Ramsay should be associated in the third part of the novel with acting is no surprise. Lily says that as he prepares for the successful trip to the lighthouse, 'he was acting, she felt, this great man was dramatizing himself' (*TL* 172). Such behaviour is characteristic of Mr Ramsay who, in the first section of the novel, had used the garden as the stage for his rendition of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' which becomes symbolic of his need to dramatize his image. John Louis DiGaetani, in *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, provides a clear examination of the impact that Wagner's operas had on Woolf's writing, and suggests that *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room*, *The Waves*, and *The Years* 'all owe something to Wagnerian opera'.[110] It seems to me that the absence of *To the Lighthouse* from this list is a notable omission. This novel does seem to owe something to Woolf's knowledge of Wagnerian thinking. The difference lies in the fact that, while DiGaetani is looking at the textual links between Woolf's subject matter and Wagner's use of mythical characters and symbolism, the preoccupation in *To the Lighthouse* is with Wagnerian aesthetic theory rather than with the subject matter of the novel. Wagner's conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk* demanded that a work of art should provide a combination of music, painting, sculpture, drama, acting, dance and the written word, and as I have noted already, Robert Donington states, in *Opera and Its Symbols*, that 'The whole object of Wagner's celebrated *Gesamtkunstwerk* was to assimilate words and music and staging in one totality'.[111] Having identified the fact that *To the Lighthouse* is interested in many of the arts, it is perhaps fair to state that Woolf was looking not at the synaesthesia of the late romantic movements (although this is part of the inquiry), but at something far more complicated. It seems that what we actually have in *To the Lighthouse* is something that grew out of Woolf's experience of all the arts and of her desire to combine these arts. We have an

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[110] J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, p. 109.
[111] Robert Donington, *Opera and Its Symbols*, p. 101.

attempt at *Gesamtkunstwerk* or at the very least an exploration of the possibility of this Wagnerian concept. We, arguably, are being offered in this novel the beginnings of a redefinition of Wagner's theory or something that could be called its Modern equivalent. This was to be a field of inquiry in *The Waves*.

## Chapter 6: The Transition from Wagnerian to Modern Concepts of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in *The Waves*

Just as *To the Lighthouse* was in part about rejection, the rejection of the aesthetics of late Romantic movements, so *The Waves* is also about rejection. Indeed, the rejection of the late Romantic movements can be seen in this novel too. Similarly, just as the earlier novel is about transition and movement, so is *The Waves*. However, the use of the character of Percival and the deployment of characters who arguably represent different facets of the Modern movement shift the focus of attention from Wagnerian theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the development of Wagner's ideas. I believe Woolf uses this novel to suggest an engagement with and development from Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories. In fact, she explores the modulation of the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* into the world of the Russian Ballet. Woolf's interest in the latter can arguably be detected in this novel, as I hope to show.

An exploration of the character of Percival is an important part of any evaluation of Woolf's interest in Wagnerism, and it does seem fair to say, in agreement with DiGaetani who has explored such connections in detail,[1] that Woolf's interest in Wagner permeates *The Waves* in a more profound and obvious way than it had her previous novels. Percival's very name is evocative of Wagner's character Parsifal and DiGaetani establishes Woolf's interest in Wagner's *Parsifal* through an examination of her essay, 'Impressions at Bayreuth'. He claims, convincingly, that it is Wagner's *Parsifal* that was of interest as opposed to the version of the story used by Malory or Jessie Weston.[2] DiGaetani's book establishes that Woolf's use and positioning of Percival in *The Waves* is of great importance and that Wagner's aesthetics are central. Indeed, Wagner's aesthetic theories are pivotal in this novel and I

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[1] J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, p. 119.

believe Woolf includes them in order to examine and challenge their standing in Modern critical theory in a more obvious way than in the previous novels. Here, Wagner's ideas are not simply hinted at, they are an intrinsic part of the novel's aesthetic pre-occupation. A comparison of Parsifal and Percival, looking particularly at the latter's role in *The Waves*, provides a starting point for an examination of this very complex pre-occupation.

In *The Waves* Woolf is using Percival to draw the reader's attention to Wagnerian ideas and in part this could be construed as an examination of the inadequacies of the Wagnerian presentation of Parsifal. First it is important to note that the characters have expectations of Percival which are, at least in part, provoked by the unstated aesthetic questions he poses to each of them. Indeed, each character feels, to varying degrees, that Percival can answer his or her questions and yet Percival often seems supremely inadequate. In *Opera and Its Symbols*, Donington states that Wagner's 'Parsifal is expected to confront questions but does not',[3] and this seems to be very much the role assigned to Percival in *The Waves*, for although the characters are certain that Percival has the ability to find or provide answers to these questions they constantly ask, they find it difficult to understand anything that Percival might communicate. Their frustration is exemplified for the novel's reader by the fact that the voiceless Percival seems indifferent as to whether the characters understand or not and he never speaks directly to the reader. Thus the reader is, like the characters, prevented from interpreting Percival through the familiar mode of verbal communication which is employed by all the other characters. The characters seek other methods of interpretation which lead to the reader's impression, since many of their responses are in negatives, of what Percival is not rather than what he is. For example, some of the first things that Neville tells us about Percival are that he has 'blue and oddly

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[2] J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, pp. 122-25.
[3] Robert Donington, *Opera and Its Symbols*, p. 133.

inexpressive eyes ... fixed with pagan indifference' (*TW* 24) and that 'he sees nothing; he hears nothing' (*TW* 24). These concepts of standing apart from others and failing to communicate verbally were part of the experience of the early audience of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Arthur Symons, in an interesting section on *Parsifal* in 'Ballet, Pantomime and Poetic Drama', describes Parsifal as 'that solitary figure at the side, merely looking on'.[4] Symons goes on to state that 'he is the centre of the action ... [and] gives one the sense of remoteness, which it was Wagner's desire to produce, throwing back the action into the reflected distance, as we watch someone on the stage who is watching it' (p. 264). Symons ultimately finds this a satisfying part of the aesthetic whole. Woolf's Percival shares similar qualities and a similar position to Parsifal, yet rather than satisfying his audience, to the six main characters with their super sensitivity to sensory perceptions, their heightened intelligence and their desires to express themselves, Percival represents their opposite. Just as Wagner presents Parsifal as a pure fool, while Woolf's presentation of Percival highlights the other characters' perceptions of his perfection through such statements as 'a wake of light seems to lie on the ground behind him' (*TW* 25), they too observe, 'He is heavy. He is clumsy' (*TW* 25), which seems to allow him to assume the role of the pure fool. It is the fact that Percival is so insensitive and seems to represent the opposite of his audience's motivation that is vital here, for Woolf seeks to identify important concepts that the Wagnerian idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* fails to draw attention to rather than the methods it promotes.

The initial sections of the novel which arguably demonstrate the characters' pre-occupation with Wagnerian methods of combining words and still images as part of the aesthetic whole, are also hinting at the methods to be employed by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the Modernist movement, for by

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[4] A. Symonds, 'Ballet, Pantomime and Poetic Drama' in *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840 – 1910, Volume 2 – Pater to Arthur Symons*, ed. E. Warner and G. Hough

mentioning Percival's faults the characters are in fact recording the means by which he communicates with them; for Percival communicates, albeit after a fashion, through not just image and words but through body language and movement, and it is this that is of particular significance to this study.

The interpretation of movement is an important, yet greatly understated, part of the characters' early evaluation of Percival. Initially, they see this as a negative force, for while Percival is associated with order based on aesthetic principles, an important part of this is linked to what the characters see as his ability to destroy that order. This destruction usually occurs through movement and happens before the other characters can fully interpret meaning. Louis states:

> This I see for a second, and shall try tonight to fix in words, to forge in a ring of steel, though Percival destroys it, as he blunders off, crushing the grasses, with the small fry trotting subservient after him (*TW* 27).

The words 'destroys', 'blunders' and 'crushing' in the above quotation are all important here, the first and last suggesting violence and brutality, while the second word suggests that this is unintentional. It must be noted that the sense of destruction emanates from the characters, since all impressions are a part of their subjective and self-conscious soliloquies; they use negative vocabulary to describe Percival's actions. Thus, at least initially, they concentrate on Percival's limitations rather than on his positive function and, because Percival remains as unaware as Parsifal of his vital role, he cannot assist them. Yet, although Woolf's other characters are aware of the potentially harmful traits in Percival's character, the fact that they are unable to reject him or dismiss him entirely shows their innate sense of his significance. And another comment by Symons seems worthy of examination here for, in considering *Parsifal*,

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(Cambridge & London, Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 264.

Symons states that the most important concept in Wagner's *Parsifal* is the visual impression, that is the pictures, created on the stage. He says that in Wagner's operas all the other arts are subordinated to this, and suggests that movement on the stage interferes with audience appreciation. He states:

> If it were once realised how infinitely more important are the lines in the picture, than the staccato extravagancies which do but aim at tearing it out of its frame, breaking violently through it, we should have learnt a little, at least, of what the art of the stage should be, of what Wagner has shown us it can be (p. 264).

This perception offers a suggestion of Woolf's characters' early interpretation of Percival's movements. They are at least initially limited by a belief that movement destroys rather than contributes to success. Percival is linked both with their abilities to create, in that they seek understanding of him, and with the inhibition of that potential. It is his movement that forms the greatest part of their early negative evaluation of him, and yet Woolf is suggesting that movement forms a vital part of the very complex creation of the total artwork. It is only Percival's death that will allow them to evaluate this movement.

The death of Percival marks a turning point in the novel because in many ways Woolf uses it to represent the end of a belief in a purely Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. From this point onwards, Woolf is exploring the modulation of this ideal into Modern idiom. Indeed, more important than an assessment of the characters' images of Percival's life is the evaluation of the message of his death. DiGaetani, quoting Harvena Richter, draws attention to Percival's role as a sacrificial hero. He goes on to suggest that 'Wagner's Parsifal, although he is not dead by the end of the opera, is also a sacrificial figure',[5] arguing that 'Wagner's Parsifal ... is a born fool who must learn pity through suffering if he is to save the Grail brotherhood' (p. 122).

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[5] J. L. DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*, pp. 122-3.

Woolf's novel, however, offers us no indication that Percival has learnt 'pity through suffering', since all evaluations of him are mediated through the imaginations of the characters and, therefore, we never know what he feels. Indeed, Percival does not survive beyond the fourth section of the novel. And yet, through their understanding of his 'sacrifice' and the suffering they suppose he must have felt, Percival does offer his 'Grail brotherhood' a means of salvation; his death allows them to evaluate their aesthetic stances and understanding of this offers them a means of progression. And, although death in some ways undermines the characters' faith in Percival's power and, indeed, some of them have already rejected Percival's influence, the interpretation of and response to Percival's act of dying is an important part of the aesthetic development of each one and of Woolf's examination of the development of Modernism. This necessarily involves looking at what movement can contribute to the total artwork. For by the time she wrote *The Waves* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Woolf's interest in Wagner, though still apparent, was different from her earlier enthusiasm.[6] Important fields of exploration in this novel seem to be progression and transition. The novel is, as its title and structure suggest, about continuous movement, the movement of the waves and the day in the interludes and the movement of the characters' lives in each section. Underpinning this movement is, I think, an examination of the progression and development of the Modern movement. So while Bloomsbury had initially shown considerable interest in Wagner, by the second decade of the twentieth-century it had been increasingly under the influence of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, a movement which, as I have already noted, Diaghilev professed had grown out of Wagner's theories. Alexander Schuvaloff notes in an essay, 'Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*: The First Phase'

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[6] It is significant to *The Waves* that, by the nineteen-twenties, Woolf was redefining her ideas on Wagner; she wrote to Barbara Bagnell in July 1923, 'I went to Tristan the other night; but the love-making bored me. When I was your age I thought it the most beautiful thing in the world.' Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 56.

that 'it was through ballet that [Diaghilev] achieved his *Gesamtkunstwerk* or synthesis of the arts'.[7] He notes Diaghilev's 'sympathies were instinctively directed more towards opera, but he recognized from Benois's example that there was a greater potential in ballet for creating the complete work of art'.[8] And it is interesting to see that Eksteins notes movement as a possible starting point for Diaghilev's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, stating:

> In a Wagnerian sally toward ultimate art Diaghilev claimed that ballet contained in itself all the other art forms. ... In the opera ... claimed Diaghilev, there were visual impediments, like stationary singers, and aural barriers, like the need to concentrate on the words, all of which interfered with the necessary fluidity of art.[9]

In saying that Diaghilev saw 'stationary singers' as 'visual impediments', Eksteins claims for Diaghilev ideas that were directly opposed to Symons's interpretation of Wagner. Diaghilev was in fact taking Wagner's ideas on *Gesamtkunstwerk*, assessing them and adapting them. Richard Shead suggests that this was a concern of Diaghilev's from the early *Le Pavillion d'Armide* which he says provided, 'the first appearance of the balletic aesthetic which was to dominate all Diaghilev's work for the stage – the Wagnerian idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.[10] Garafola notes the interest of the whole ballet group in Wagner in the 1890s, suggesting that *Gesamtkunstwerk* provided 'a theoretical framework'[11] which united the company. She records Janet Kennedy's comment that Wagner's ideas were 'the greatest single influence on the attitude of the *Mir iskusstva* group',[12] and states that by 1910 Benois felt they

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[7] Alexander Schouvaloff, 'Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*: The First Phase' in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes*, ed. Ann Kodicek (London: Barbican Art Gallery / Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996), p. 87.
[8] Alexander Schouvaloff, 'Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*: The First Phase' in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes*, ed. Ann Kodicek,. p. 87.
[9] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 24.
[10] R. Shead, *Ballets Russes*, p. 22.
[11] L. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 45.
[12] Quoted in L. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 45.

had achieved many of their aims. For the ballet company, this interest in Wagner provided a source for experimentation, yet such experimentation was very much about transition and adaptation, and Diaghilev's interest in the movement of individuals on stage and in rhythm form probably his most radical departure from the Wagnerian theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is this distinction between Wagnerian theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Diaghilev's developments of such ideas that is important for *The Waves*, for the evaluation of Percival by the characters in the novel arguably displays similar thinking to Diaghilev's understanding.

Indeed, one of the techniques used by Woolf to describe Percival's death suggests connections with the *Ballets Russes* which are linked to an understanding of movement and rhythm. Percival's death in the fifth section of the novel is recorded by Neville who notes, 'He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown' (*TW* 101). Here the staccato nature of the sentence structure used by Neville presents us with a series of visual images not unlike those on a bas-relief. They tell a story. Repetition of these images with their suggestions of specific poses throughout the remainder of the novel, evokes the same still images each time. In *L'Après midi d'un faun*, Nijinsky had paid careful attention to the creation of similar visual effects in his choreography. Jann Pasler says:

> Nijinsky had learned how to produce the effect of an archaic Greek bas-relief by making the dancers [and he quotes Grigoriev] "move with bent knees and feet placed flat on the ground, heel first ...". He achieved a two-dimensionality comparable to that of the backdrop by having the dancers move only in profile and across the stage rather than forward or backward. In order to imitate Greek vase paintings for this Greek pastoral, Nijinsky had the characters pause after each

> change of position, as if they were characters in a series of paintings, one viewed after another.[13]

Pasler states that a similar technique had been used in *Jeux*, this time modelled on Gauguin reproductions.[14] Buckle notes that in Nijinsky's choreography for the ballet, 'The human figure was dehumanized, and the dancers ... were elements in a two dimensional composition'. They had in fact produced 'a moving Greek frieze',[15] and Lynn Garafola states that the inception of these ideas in *Ballets Russes* aesthetics had its roots in the company's interest in stagecraft and in their understanding of Meyerhold's principles of 'static theatre'. Such ideas had grown out of a 1905 Theatre-Studio play, *The Death of Tantagiles*, in which, Garafola says, the director had spoken of 'a method of placing figures on stage in bas-reliefs and frescoes and a means of expressing interior monologue with the help of the music of plastic motion'.[16] A similar sort of technique can be seen throughout Woolf's presentation of Percival. It is used to give us our initial impressions of him at school, and is particularly apparent in the fourth section in Bernard's short statements, 'Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet' (*TW* 91), where the sentence's punctuation has the effect of reducing the sense of actual movement so that the reader is given the impression of a series of individual still images.

Yet, taken together, the series of statements, 'Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet' (*TW* 91) and 'He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown' (*TW* 101) do suggest that the progression of Percival and the pictures which often suggest movement build on traditional

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[13] Jann Pasler, 'Music and Spectacle in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*' in *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist* ed. J Pasler (University of California Press Los Angeles and London, 1986), p. 74.
[14] Jann Pasler, 'Music and Spectacle in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*' in *Confronting Stravinsky*, p. 74.
[15] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 185.
[16] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 54.

imagery to contribute to the reader's idea of him as hero in transition (the 'flea-bitten mare' suggests something closer to Don Quixote, that earlier re-definition of an accepted view of the hero). Yet, when the friends saw him for the last time before he went to India, Bernard had commented, 'he is conventional; he is a hero' (*TW* 82) and Louis has been certain from school days that Percival would 'attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle' (*TW* 25). This identifies an area of interest, stemming from Wagnerian thinking, which is common to both the theories of Diaghilev's ballet company (where Diaghilev was shying away from traditional Romantic ballets), and to the theories examined in Woolf's novel, for Percival's standing as a hero is another important facet of his aesthetic stance. The novel identifies this issue and seeks to re-define concepts of heroism through a rejection of the past. A part of this is the understanding the characters have that Percival is both 'remote ... in a pagan universe' and also 'some mediaeval commander' (*TW* 24-25), which places him in both a pagan and a Christian world so like the world of Wagner's operas.

Percival is an enigma for the characters because they cannot quite place him neatly in either of the worlds which provide their cultural heritage precisely because he presents them with a muddle of Christian and pagan ideas. Understanding can only be gained through examination of this and the evaluation of what both aspects of Percival can offer to art. Put rather simply, the 'Christian knight' side of Percival emphasizes for the characters the moral perspective to existence which can be seen in the distinctly patronizing image of Percival going to India to tame the heathens, while the pagan side to Percival offers the possibility of a freer kind of expression because of its characteristic indifference to social values. In essence, the two aspects are akin to the Apolline / Dionysian traits noted in the chapter on *Mrs Dalloway*, while the pagan Dionysian traits take us back to Diaghilev's company which was engaged in a battle to free art from the restraints of morality. Eksteins notes

that Diaghilev's art was based on expression, because he saw 'in ballet a superior art form for expressing, through action and movement instead of passion and argument, the totality of the human personality, both spiritual and physical, and the essence of the nonverbal, nonrational world'.[17] Eksteins also draws attention to the fact that Christianity had often, in its more puritanical manifestations, rejected dance and movement. Looked at separately as individual still pictures, the images of Percival represent images of a Christian hero constrained by rational ethical demands which the characters seem to admire even if this admiration is given rather grudgingly. The characters proclaim him a hero and imagine a hero's end for him. In fact, Percival's death is a rather banal accident which denies him heroic status. However, taken together as a series of sequential frames, the images create a 'moving' picture of Percival's progress and suggest a downward movement which seems to record his decline as a hero. Percival is in fact undone by a trick of nature, because as Neville tells us, 'His horse tripped' (*TW* 119). There is a harsh pagan world which is as indifferent to him as he himself seems to be to others, showing the same kind of 'pagan indifference' (*TW* 24) that Neville had noted in Percival at the beginning of the school section and which seems to make him so much a part of the 'nonverbal, nonrational world' which Eksteins said ballet represented for Diaghilev, arguably a development of Nietzsche's revision of Wagner's ideas. Percival is not unlike the sacrificial virgin in the *Rites of Spring*, yet the characters who comment immediately after his death sense the loss of a Christian ideal, first and perhaps most forcefully noted in Neville's statement, 'the lights of the world have gone out' (*TW* 101); and it is through understanding of the loss of this dimension that they are able to gain expression. Having lost the Christian, the characters must focus on the pagan, and in identifying this, they are allowed to focus on one of the main issues in Modern aesthetics, the question of the place of the artist in society. Eksteins

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[17] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 36

notes this issue in Diaghilev's company, stating that, 'Like Nietzsche, Diaghilev believed that autonomy of the artist and morality were mutually exclusive. A man obsessed with morality, with socially acceptable behaviour, could never be free' (p. 30). In the interests of freedom, both Diaghilev and Woolf seem to be acknowledging the need for a rejection of some of Wagner's ideas.

It is important to state once again that in their initial keenness to note how little he can communicate both orally and through images, the characters miss the fact that Percival does communicate with them. What they need to assess once Percival is dead is the means by which he communicated. Percival was himself an image and a symbol, the central flame around which the moths fluttered, yet he was a constantly moving and at times elusive flame. It was his movement that frustrated them. While his death represents the extinguishing of the flame it also provides an opportunity for reflection. Part of Percival's aesthetic message while alive was achieved in the way he moved and the rhythms or waves that he created. It is this that provides an interesting connection with the world of ballet and Diaghilev's experiments to extend the field of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Commenting on Wagner's *Parsifal*, Woolf had stated:

> The unfamiliarity of the ideas hinders one at the outset from bringing the different parts together. One feels vaguely for a crisis that never comes, for, accustomed as one is to find the explanation of a drama in the love of man and woman, or in battle, one is bewildered by a music that continues with the utmost calm and intensity independent of them.[18]

For Woolf, Wagner's work failed to unite its many disparate parts. In this she differed radically from Symons, for considering Wagner's achievement in

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[18] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, Volume 1, p. 289.

*Parsifal* in a discussion of the importance of image, the latter had noted that in the pictures created on stage, 'so perfectly do all the arts flow into one'.[19] However, Symons had gone on to state that 'the picture impresses one chiefly by its rhythm, the harmonies of its convention. The lesson of *Parsifal* is the lesson that, in art, rhythm is everything',[20] and here, neither Diaghilev nor Woolf would have disagreed; the disagreement lies in the interpretation. Diaghilev and his associates had understood the importance of rhythm and so did Woolf, yet for both rhythm was associated with the vital concept of movement. Thus, their ideas grew out of a development of the concepts that Symons notes in Wagnerism. Both were exploring the possibilities of the aesthetic transition to the Modern world. Having examined the characters' interpretation of Percival, it is now important to look at how this influences their developing aesthetic stances providing points of connection with the aesthetic rationale behind Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*.

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Actual connections between Bloomsbury and Diaghilev can be readily identified and the opening section of this thesis looked at these briefly. It is now necessary to explore these in more detail because further links can be identified. Lynn Garafola notes that Leonard Woolf states in his memoir, *Beginning Again*, that when he returned from Ceylon in 1911:

> In Literature one seemed to feel the ominous lull before the storm ... In painting we were in the middle of the profound revolution of Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso ... And to crown it all, night after night we flocked to Covent Garden, entranced by a new art, a revelation to us benighted British,

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[19] A. Symonds, 'Ballet, Pantomime and Poetic Drama,' in *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840 – 1910*, Volume 2, p. 263 –4.
[20] A. Symonds, 'Ballet, Pantomime and Poetic Drama,' p. 263 –4.

> the Russian Ballet in the greatest days of Diaghilev and Nijinski.[21]

By 1912 and 1913, there is evidence that Bloomsbury was very much involved with the work of the ballet. During these seasons, Diaghilev, Nijinsky and Bakst were entertained by Lady Ottoline Morell and it is she who notes Lytton Strachey's admiration for the ballet.[22] Rupert Brooke, a figure on the periphery of Bloomsbury life but important to Woolf, was very much influenced by the Russian Ballet; Buckle notes that both Geoffrey Keynes and Cathleen Nesbitt stated that they had been to the ballets with him.[23] In his study of artists in Woolf's immediate circle in *Bloomsbury Portraits*, Richard Shone points out the impact that Diaghilev's company had in many areas of life. He states, 'its influence was widespread in the theatre, in interior decoration and fashion, and on painting'.[24] Quentin Bell, in his biography of his aunt, suggests that Woolf saw the Russian Ballet during the 1913 season: 'On 7th July they were again in London, going to Ottoline's after dinner, to Gordon Square, to the Russian Ballet, to *Don Giovanni*'.[25] The interest was furthered after the war. 1918 saw the arrival in London of Lydia Lopokova who would become Maynard Keynes's wife. The reintroduction of the ballet induced members of the Bloomsbury circle to make a number of trips to the theatre. The ideas of the company permeated London and specifically Bloomsbury in a very profound way so it is worth looking further not just at Diaghilev's ideas on Wagner, but also at his ideas on and experiments with Modern theory.

First it is important to acknowledge that Diaghilev's company's early ideas grew out of the symbolist movement. Garafola notes that Bakst used

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[21] From Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again*, in Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 314.
[22] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 232-3.
[23] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 236.
[24] Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, p. 96.
[25] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, Volume 2 (London: Pimlico, 1996; first published, Bloomsbury, 1972), p. 12.

symbolist ideas,[26] and states that *Mir iskussta* grew out of symbolism (p. 15). She also states that:

> From symbolism came a broad assortment of ideas: themes of the beleaguered individual and the commedia dell'arte, notions of synaesthesia, suggestiveness, and subjectivity, the cult of beauty ... Announcements of modernity, these fin-de-siècle ideas linked [Fokine's] work to movements in the other arts to reimage reality rather than represent it phenomenologically, and to experiments of choreographic successors who would complete and transcend the modernist revolution he had initiated (p. 25).

This is important because Woolf's characters, in *The Waves* as in *To the Lighthouse*, are reacting initially to a Pre-Raphaelite / Symbolist world and define their Modernist ideas as a response to this. Connections can also be suggested between Diaghilev's ideas and Aestheticism as both were, according to Eksteins, involved in rebelling against rationalism. Eksteins identifies in Diaghilev's ideas a belief that, 'art would not teach – that would make it subservient; it would excite, provoke, inspire. It would unlock experience';[27] the Dionysian must be catered for.

Having experimented with the ideas on which the Modern movement was founded, Diaghilev considered issues which have come to be traditionally associated with that movement. Initially this involved an examination of primitive ideas. Many of the ballets draw on Russian peasant culture and indeed the peasant cultures of other countries. It was something that Gleb Pospelov notes in the work of Diaghilev's company. He asserts:

> This is apparent in Roerich's decor, both for the *Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* and for Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*; it is revealed even more clearly in the Stravinsky score itself, in the dances of the crowds in

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[26] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 35.
[27] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 32.

> *Petrushka*, in the mass-movements of *The Rite of Spring*, where it seems as though the lust for freedom of the earth itself had been awakened.[28]

Stemming from this, there is Diaghilev's interest in exoticism: a leaning towards the exoticism of the oriental cultures can be identified in works such as *Cléopatre* (1909) and *Firebird* (1910). Exoticism was associated with the Modern movement's interest in sexual freedom where 'a motif of eroticism dominated the search for newness and change',[29] which was very much a rejection of nineteenth-century puritanism. This can be seen in *Schéhérazade* (1910) and in more muted forms in *Jeux* (1913) and *Petrouchka* (1911). And indeed, as Eksteins notes, 'In all the ballets, the colours of the set, the boldness of the costumes, and the sustained energy of the dancing accentuated the passion' (p. 34). Connected with the movement towards ideas freed from puritan restriction was the interest in the visual and in rhythm which is probably most marked in *The Rites of Spring* (1913) and which took members of the group to visit Dalcroze in Hellerau, bringing them into close contact with the eurythmic theories of Isadora Duncan.[30]

As in other Modern Arts, diametrically opposed to the interest in primitivism was the debate over Classicism which really came to the fore in the later ballets and was notably of interest in the 1920s. Diaghilev's ballets had as their foundation a knowledge and implied understanding of Classicism. Indeed, some of Diaghilev's post-war work was informed by a sense of the importance of a Classical understanding. Garafola states that Diaghilev saw the work of the composer, Cimarosa, as embodying the Classical vision he

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[28] Gleb Pospelov, 'The Diaghilev Seasons and the Early Russian Avant-Garde,' in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes: Art, Music, Dance*, ed. Ann Kodicek, p.107.
[29] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 34.
[30] An account of Isadora Duncan's involvement with Diaghilev's company is given by Elizabeth Souritz in an article, 'Isadora Duncan and Prewar Russian Dancemakers', in *The Ballets Russes and Its World*, ed. Lynn Garafola & Nancy Van Norman Baer, pp. 97 – 115.

had. She states that the pull of the Classical for Diaghilev was associated with the fact that 'its insistence on the primacy of style offered a formal counterpoint to the nostalgia and sentimentality implicit in retrospective visions of the past'.[31] It was something that developed after Diaghilev first became interested in Futurism. Indeed, when *The Sleeping Princess* was performed in London in 1921, many critics felt that it was a betrayal of Modernist principles.[32] Buckle notes that, 'Bloomsbury intellectuals disapproved of the old-fashioned spectacle'.[33] Classicism was specifically associated with the work of Balanchine and involved the ballet in a flirtation with idealism and neo-orthodox spirituality which were motivated by Classicism. Balanchine worked with Stravinsky on *Apollon Musagete* (1928) of which Garafola quotes Boris de Schloezer's statement that it 'reveals Stravinsky's … need of purity and serenity'.[34]

While Classicism represents a largely conservative impulse felt within Modernism, particularly and significantly in the years after the war with its catastrophic destruction of order, Diaghilev also experimented with the ideas of the more radical Modern movements such as Cubism, Futurism and Surrealism. In fact, the culmination of Diaghilev's flirtation with Cubism and Futurism was *Parade* (1917), a work with which Picasso, Satie, Cocteau and Apollinaire were involved. Although it is widely known as a Cubist ballet, Kenneth Silver argues that this ballet, too, owed something to Classicism; for when the curtain went up for the audience, 'they saw not a Cubist display but the first great public and monumental example of the new avant-garde neo-classicism – an overture curtain of sublimely Latin sentiment painted by Pablo Picasso'.[35] However, it is important to note that the motivation for the ballet was based on the more radical *avant-garde* movements. Diaghilev had become

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[31] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 93 – 4.
[32] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 115 – 118.
[33] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 392.
[34] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 140.

interested in Futurism in about 1914, partly because of the group's ideas on stagecraft. Garafola states that, 'the first steps of Diaghilev's modernist revolution took place under the aegis of futurism'.[36] She goes on to argue that it was Futurism that moved Diaghilev's thinking away from naturalism towards a more synthetic technique. According to this impulse, characterization was subordinate to design and the Futurist interest in the geometric can also be seen. It is known that Diaghilev considered producing Luigi Russolo's *Printing Press* and that Russolo contributed a mise-en-scène for Stravinsky's *Fireworks* (1917) which was a play of light show on geometric solids.[37] *Parade* of course embodied many of these ideas. Then in 1926 Diaghilev went to a Surrealist exhibition in Paris. Here, he bought pictures by Max Ernst and Miro, which initiated his fleeting interest in this, the youngest of the Modernist movements. Diaghilev gave the commission for *Romeo and Juliet* (1926) to these artists, a very personal and by no means universally approved choice. Constant Lambert, who worked on the ballet, stated in a letter to his mother, 'Diaghilev had chosen two 10th-rate painters from an imbecile group called the 'Surrealistes'.[38] In the same letter Lambert described the décor as 'monstrous' and resented Diaghilev's changes in choreography. The Surrealist movement in its turn resented the appropriation of their members by a group that they considered at least a manifestation of the bourgeois values they so resented.[39] What all these sources of influence serve to suggest is the diverse nature of Diaghilev's involvement in Modernism, a sense of which probably led Gerald Murphy, who took lessons

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[35] Kenneth E. Silver, Silver *Esprit de Corps*, p. 119.
[36] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 78.
[37] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 79-80.
[38] R. Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 467.
[39] R. Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 469. Diaghilev was offered police protection and during the first performance there was a riot in the stalls.

from the primitivist, Natalia Gontcharova, to describe the ballet company as 'the focal point of the whole Modern movement'.[40]

The attraction of the ballet company for Bloomsbury is immediately apparent. It is possible to suggest links with individual ballets. For example, one Diaghilev ballet which invites associations with *The Waves* in general is *Jeux*, and there is a strong likelihood that Bloomsbury provided the inspiration for this ballet which was performed during the 1913 season. The tennis references in the school section of *The Waves* seem to hint at this ballet, for Jacques-Emile Blanche describing *Jeux* stated, 'The 'cubist' ballet - which became *Jeux* - was a game of tennis in a garden',[41] and Buckle, drawing attention to the fact that it was while they were taking tea with Lady Ottoline that Duncan Grant met Nijinsky, Vaslav and Bakst, speculates that the game of tennis that Grant played during this meeting inspired Bakst's designs for *Jeux*.[42] Jacques-Emile Blanche subsequently stated that the essence of the ballet was 'girls in flannels, and rhythmic movements'.[43] (It is also interesting to note that Garafola gives as 'one of the images that inspired the ballet', the picture of 'moths circling an arc-light',[44] which also links generally to the characters in *The Waves* through Woolf's own association of them with moths.)

It is also possible to argue that, not only were individual works of Diaghilev's company of interest to Woolf, but the aesthetic issues being examined by the *Ballets Russes* are the same issues being examined through the use of individual characters in *The Waves*. This is apparent in the way that the characters interpret Percival and in the development of their own attitudes and theories, for the six characters who may be shown to stand for different

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[40] C. Spencer, *The World of Serge Diaghilev* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), p. 109.
[41] Richard Buckle, *Diagilev*, p. 234.
[42] Richard Buckle, *Diagilev*, p. 234. A possible link between Woolf's presentation of Percival and the Russian Ballet has already been noted.
[43] Richard Buckle, *Diagilev*, p. 234.
[44] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 62.

facets of aesthetic Modernism are, I wish to argue, representatives of areas specifically associated with the Modernist experiments of Diaghilev's ballet company. It may be no accident that Woolf's characters' lives span the years of the *Ballets'* development and, while specific links with the ballet are rarely obvious, Woolf's characters intriguingly mirror many of Diaghilev's ideas and are being used as part of her examination of these ideas. Connections can certainly be seen between Woolf's thinking and Eksteins's evaluation of Diaghilev's art:

> The goal of his grand ballet was to produce synthesis – of all the arts, of a legacy of history and a vision of the future, of orientalism and westernism, of the modern and the feudal, of aristocrats and peasants, of decadence and barbarism, of man and woman... He wished to fuse the double image of contemporary life – an age of transition – into a vision of wholeness, with emphasis, however, on the vision rather than the wholeness, on the quest, the striving, on the pursuit of wholeness, continuing and changing though this can be.[45]

*The Waves* is also an exploration that involves looking at all the arts and at the possibility of their combined usage, reflecting ways in which Diaghilev experimented with *Gesamtkunstwerk.* The first six sections of Woolf's novel seem to show the developing aesthetic traits in the characters and, for instance, it is possible to suggest that Bernard is used to mark the transition from late nineteenth-century movements to Modernism. Then, in his role as Modern novelist, he tracks the progress of the other movements. Susan and Jinny represent different aspects of Primitivism and display the interest in rhythm found in Diaghilev's ballets, while Jinny is also associated with sexual freedom, another aspect of the ballets. Together, these three characters exhibit an interest in Expressionism. The other three characters find verbal expression more difficult, yet they too are associated with Modernist factions. Neville has

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[45] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 33.

an affinity with Classicism, Louis's ideas hint at an understanding of Cubism and Futurism, while Rhoda's ideas, connecting with Louis's Futurist ideas initially, eventually suggest Surrealism. Bernard and Rhoda both examine the importance of the theatre. I am not suggesting that each character stands only for an aesthetic movement or that the novel is actually about Diaghilev's ballet company. I recognize that the movements noted above are very much European movements and the characters in the novel, with the exception of Louis, who is Australian, are very much English characters. However, it does seem to me that one of Woolf's interests in this novel is to examine the impact of these movements and this provokes connections with the ideas of the *Ballets Russes*. The sections after section six hint at the failure of the characters' individual ideas, yet Bernard's comments at the end seem to suggest that through combination they can find some form of expression which the novel in its entirety might be said to demonstrate. The synchronism and simultaneity of the characters' existence is crucial to Woolf's examination here, and it is with this in mind that I want to look more closely at their individual aesthetic leanings.

Bernard's aesthetic leanings are the first to be identified. From the first section, Bernard is seen as story-teller, as literary artist. Woolf uses him in this section to comment on the aesthetic heritage of the Modern movement, demonstrating a genealogy similar to that of the ballet company. Just as the *Ballets'* ideas grew as a reaction to nineteenth-century social mores so Woolf uses Bernard to explore such a reaction. Thus it is in a garden that Bernard first exercises his talent as a story-teller as he tries to comfort Susan who is traumatized by the experience of seeing Jinny kiss Louis. He tells Susan a story that has at its centre many late nineteenth-century images. He presents her with a 'white house lying among the trees' (*TW* 11). As he tells the story, the children seem to be removed from the world of the house in their positions as omniscient narrator and listener. Bernard describes 'the close-clipped hedge of

the ladies' garden ... [where] they walk at noon, with scissors, clipping roses' (*TW* 11). However, the world just outside Elvedon holds less pleasant things which seem to signal autumn. Here, the 'red funguses' and the 'rotten oak apples, red with age and slippery' (*TW* 11) are definitely autumnal, and this seems to signal the end of one state of being and the beginning of another. The autumnal references display the decay of the old ways in preparation for the new world that will form the children's futures. Bernard encourages Susan to climb up and look over the wall as if they are looking at a forbidden world: Susan notes, 'I see the lady writing. I see the gardeners sweeping' (*TW* 12). Yet, they fear being seen by the gardener and shot, and Bernard urges 'Run! ... Run! ... We are in hostile country' (*TW* 12). The concept of retreat is important, for Woolf's children need to escape to the beech wood with its funguses and decay and to do so they take the secret path. It is important too to note this feeling of exclusion, for Bernard feels that they are at odds with the world of the house with its walled garden where the women pick roses, another rejection of a heroic, chivalric environment. It is as if they have been expelled, and symbolically this is a central perception in this novel, and confirms the reader's sense of the children's difference. They become, like their *Ballets Russes* counterparts, aesthetic refugees.

The sense that they are different, not just from each other, but from the rest of the world, forms a key part of Bernard's early perceptions, yet it is their new environment that is really of significance. When Bernard says, 'Let us take possession of our secret territory, which is lit by pendant currants like candelabra, shining red on one side black on the other' (*TW* 15), he is alluding to their place in a more primitive visual world which is very different from the civilized garden, and this provides a connection with Diaghilev's company's thinking. Bernard's sense that 'we are giants, lying here, who can make forests quiver' (*TW* 16) heralds the children's attempts to make an impact on the world. The desire to escape from the enclosed world of the late nineteenth-century is

marked by their sense of the impact they will make in other ways. Once safely away from this world, images of freedom make evident the importance of their flight; the children feel that they can 'stand upright again. Now we can stretch our arms in this high canopy' (*TW* 12). Like *Ballets Russes* practitioners they are fleeing from restriction, and the images describing this flight are significantly ones of physical movement – 'stand[ing] upright', 'stretch[ing] arms'.

Indeed, Woolf's use of Bernard to explore concepts of Modernism goes beyond a simple exploration of theory: Woolf is also looking at technique. Bernard's sensitivity to language and words is established early in the novel. Thinking of words, he says, 'They flick their tails right and left as I speak them ... they wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks ... now dividing now coming together' (*TW* 14). The sentence is an interesting one, not least because of the number of images created. The first idea, 'they flick their tails', suggests the image of a fish. The word 'wag' modulates the image to a dog, while the idea of the air suggests birds as does the word 'flock'. While the simplicity of this language, created by the use of a lot of repetition, demonstrates the importance that Bernard places on images and allows Woolf to demonstrate the versatility of words, there is another aspect that is very important. For importantly, Bernard's words create not still images, but images which suggest movement. It is this that suggests aesthetic progression from the still images of the garden in the first section to the new world, and this manifestation of movement in art suggests the *Ballets'* theories again. Equally important is the fact that by the end of the first section, Bernard is beginning to attune himself to the sounds around him, 'I hear though it is far off ... the chorus beginning; wheels; dogs; men shouting; church bells' (*TW*18), and Woolf develops awareness of Bernard's sensitivity to the sound of words in the school section where he asserts 'I love tremendous and sonorous words' (*TW* 22).

The development of Bernard's perception of himself as a writer comes while he is at university, and encompasses a mixture of ideas. These significantly continue to involve an identification with movement, with rhythm and with the stage. Much of Bernard's evaluation of himself centres on the idea that he is 'not one and simple, but complex and many' (*TW* 51), like the Modern movement and like Diaghilev's company with its many facets. This contrasts him with the essentially simple, statuesque Percival who comes increasingly to represent a past way of life. In essence, Bernard is stating something that Woolf herself was coming to understand. The imagery used in this section weaves a complex web of ideas associated with rhythm, music, the stage and painting as Bernard realizes, 'I ... have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard' (*TW* 51). He recognizes 'rhythm is the main thing in writing' (*TW* 53), and notes, 'I can sketch the surroundings' (*TW* 54), showing an awareness of the importance of setting, which was of course becoming more and more important in the *Ballets Russes'* work. Bernard's need is to imitate others while in turn he recognizes 'I need an audience' (*TW* 78). Indeed, the novel shows Bernard evolve from part of an audience watching Percival, to his role as Modernist writer and performer, and as the novel progresses, so Bernard seems to experiment with the ideas and images of many of the other movements, culminating in the final section where, in the absence of the other characters, he is able to merge all their ideas. However, Bernard recognizes earlier his dependence on the others and had stated: 'I wish, then, after this somnolence to sparkle, many-faceted under the light of my friends' faces. ... With them I am many-sided. They retrieve me from the darkness' (*TW* 78). This is an interesting image because of its complex attention to visual impact. It also provides a connection with the stage, an idea that Woolf had been experimenting with in *To the Lighthouse*. The combinations of word and image in Bernard's perception of himself are important because they suggest

the importance of aesthetic assimilation. For Bernard, a moment of recognition is achieved when Percival's death coincides with the birth of his son. The old way gives way to the new, just as, for Woolf and Diaghilev, an interest in Wagnerism had suggested a new set of theories which developed from understanding of the older ideas. Combination, movement and an awareness of the possibilities of the stage provide a way forward.

Eksteins, in his exploration of Diaghilev's impact, emphasizes that, 'dance – the attempt to join mind and body in the same rhythm – became an important medium for the modern movement',[46] and states that this 'was natural'.[47] In *The Waves*, it is Jinny who is associated with movement from the outset, and it is often through movement that she defines herself as different and Modern. Her aesthetic stance is even more obviously connected with the theatre than are Bernard's ideas, and ultimately she provides the most direct association with dance. First mentioned in connection with 'a crimson tassel ... twisted with gold threads' (*TW* 6), which has theatrical overtones, she is the one most associated with the need to be in the light, noting, 'I burn, I shiver ... out of this sun, into this shadow' (*TW* 8). In this first section, she is depicted running, noticing movement, demanding explanations for movement. In fact it is Jinny who is the dancer, perceiving early on, 'I dance, I ripple, I am thrown over you like a net of light, I lie quivering flung over you' (*TW* 8). She is very aware of the power of body language, and seems to say less than the other characters, while what she does say is very much centred on her own actions and gestures. These contribute to her form of expression: she communicates through movement, which immediately puts her at odds with Symons understanding of the Wagnerian theatrical ideal. At school Susan realizes, 'Jinny always dances ... she turns cartwheels in the playground; she picks

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[46] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 34.
[47] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 34.

flowers forbiddenly' (*TW* 28). Furthermore, Jinny is aware of the whole body, not just her face. This makes her reject the small mirror in favour of the 'long glass' (*TW* 28) where she can see herself whole. Verbs used to describe her movements suggest energy, 'I leap', ' I ripple', 'I move, I dance; I never cease to move and to dance' (*TW* 28). In this she seems to provoke connections with the violent expression of the Fauve movement, and with a kind of Primitivism noted in Stravinsky's *Firebird* and in the work of Natalia Gontcharova, both of which showed the influence of the East.

It is this association with eastern Primitivism that provides the second possible point of connection with Diaghilev's ballet, for as Jinny matures, so Woolf's interest in Jinny focuses more and more on her sensuality. In Jinny, eroticism is associated with sources of primal energy such as the flame, and there is often a sense of the primitive in her early responses to herself which are later matured by London society, whose social and moral ethics her primitive, almost pagan energy seems to challenge, just as the events of Percival's death had challenged the Romantic concept of him as a noble hero. Eksteins says, 'In all the ballets, the colours of the set, the boldness of the costumes, and the sustained energy of the dancing accentuated the passion',[48] and this is not unlike the reader's experience of Jinny.

In Woolf's presentation of this character the use of dance imagery, the descriptions of movement, the associations of colour and the championing of sexual freedom, also seem to identify Jinny closely with specific *Ballets Russes* productions. While ballets such as *Cléopatre* and *Schéhérazade* provide the most obvious connection with Jinny's primitive exoticism and desire for sexual expression, four other works seem equally relevant. The first of these is Debussy's *Après midi d'un faune* (1912) which suggests links because of the use of the scarf. The ballet tells the story of a faun who watches seven nymphs. One of them undresses to bathe in the stream. The faun wishes

to confront the nymph, but when he tries she runs away and he is left with only her scarf.[49] Woolf's presentation of Jinny, while it provokes an interesting parallel with the ballet is different in that Jinny keeps the scarf. However, Jinny's desire to seduce can be connected with the nymph's behaviour. Garafola, describing the ballet draws attention to 'the seductiveness of the Chief Nymph, who throws off not one but three veils as if by this striptease to pierce the Faun's self-involvement'.[50]

It is not just movement, but images of Jinny and colour associations that suggest *Firebird* composed by Stravinsky which Woolf would have known because Maynard Keynes's wife, Lydia Lopokova, danced this part in one of the London seasons.[51] Buckle describes how the audience of *The Firebird* 'heard the mysterious introduction, with its hint of night terrors; they saw the Firebird flash across the dark clearing in the orchard to her incandescent music'.[52] This description sounds not unlike the description of Jinny as she steals up on Louis at the beginning of Woolf's novel. Links with the colour red, through the red tassel, and associations with fire in the other character's perceptions, such as 'Jinny's eyes dance with fire' (*TW* 96), compound this idea. That Stephen Walsh in *The Music of Stravinsky* should describe the music of *The Firebird* as 'a work of synthesis rather than innovation'[53] also evokes connections with Jinny's role in Woolf's novel, because Jinny is not associated with innovation but with an evaluation of older, more primitive ideas in a modern world.

In the presentation of Jinny Woolf adds to the interest in the visual and in movement a marked interested in rhythm which she shared with the ballet.

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[48] M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 34.
[49] Richard Buckle, *Diagilev*, p. 224.
[50] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 56.
[51] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, pp. 347 - 8. (*The Dancing Times* had, according to Richard Buckle said of Lopokova that she 'dance[d] like a maenad and electrifie[d] the audience with the sheer joy and seemingly boundless vitality of her movements' when she appeared in *The Good Humoured Ladies* in 1918.)
[52] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 175.

Diaghilev's experiments with rhythm at the *Ballets Russes* had formed an important part of its initial success and culminated in Stravinsky's experimental work, *Le Sacre du printemps*, that grew out of *The Firebird*. Diaghilev and Nijinsky, as I mentioned earlier, had visited Dalcroze in Hellerau while working on this ballet. Buckle states: 'Dalcroze's system, which was not really to do with the art of dancing, but was a highly organized method of analysing music by bodily movement, might hold the key Diaghilev and Nijinsky were looking for'.[54] Isadora Duncan whose 'rare musicality', Garafola states, 'suggested new ways of linking movement and sound',[55] was also connected with this group. Although she is clearly not the sacrificial virgin that is central to Stravinsky's work, Jinny's attention to rhythmic movement, and the potential emptiness of her life at the end, do hint at her sacrifice to rhythm.

Susan, who also represents a form of Primitivism, is also used by Woolf to explore rhythm, and experiences a similar emptiness which is linked to this concept. The leaning towards Primitivism in Europe in the closing years of the nineteenth-century and at the beginning of the twentieth-century seems to be embodied as much in this character as in Jinny and so, while I do not wish to argue that Woolf is looking at exactly the same primitive traditions as the artists of the Russian Ballet, it is possible to suggest that the root interest was the same: the uncivilized peasant culture against the civilized world, interpreted by inhabitants of the latter world. As Gleb Pospelov notes, 'in the mass-movements of *The Rite of Spring*, ... it seems as though the lust for freedom of the earth itself had been awakened',[56] so a quest for freedom is an

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[53] Stephen Walsh, *The Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 21.
[54] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 238. It is interesting to note that Dalcroze's studio had been designed for him by Adolf Appia who had influenced Gordon Craig, whose designs Fry had written about.
[55] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 41.
[56] Gleb Pospelov, 'The Diaghilev Seasons and the Early Russian Avant-Garde,' in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes*, ed. Ann Kodicek, p. 107.

important part of Susan's struggle. This struggle involves a retreat into primitivism. Susan's early assertion, 'I have eyes that look close to the ground' (*TW* 10) is part of her identification with a primitive culture, and other statements sustain this link. For instance, the first thing that Susan notices is a slab of yellow meeting a purple stripe; this is later identified with the fields of her maturity stretching away to meet the horizon. Her imagery is elemental and her pictures, such as Mrs Constable pulling up her stockings, have a simplicity about them; Bernard may be able to string words together, but Susan is 'tied down with single words' (*TW* 11). In introducing an article, 'Primitivism and the "Modern"', Gill Perry states:

> Increasingly, forms of representation that were explicitly or implicitly *opposed* to urban Western culture co-existed with and displaced those nineteenth-century notions of modernity that were concerned with the aesthetic potential of urban themes.[57]

In the first two sections, we see Susan, in a bid for freedom, reject two possible settings. The rejection of the Pre-Raphaelite garden has already been discussed in connection with Bernard. In the second section of the novel, Susan is sent to school to be offered a further taste of the civilized world. Her rejection of this is equally emphatic; she notes, 'All here is false; all is meretricious' (*TW* 22). Unable to accept the imposed order, Susan equates the days with crippled moths 'with shrivelled wings unable to fly' (*TW* 36). Her desire is the freedom that she perceives will succeed school. It is, I think, important to note that Susan makes what is arguably a conscious decision to reject the 'civilized' world in which she feels uncomfortable. It is this that links her with Primitive artists and with the work of Diaghilev's group where similar decisions had been made. It is also important to note that in presenting

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[57] Gill Perry, in C. Harrison, F. Frascin, G. Perry (eds.), *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, p. 3.

us with Susan, Woolf is in fact presenting us with a bourgeois character who seeks inspiration in the natural world, for while Susan notes, 'I think of crusts and bread and butter and white plates in a sunny room' (*TW* 67), which has a rustic aura to it, this image also provides an image of civilized primitivism not unlike the one projected by Bell and Grant.[58] Susan is not 'primitive', but she adopts a style of life based on Primitive ideas and styles. It is as a consequence of her Primitive stand point that Susan seems out of place in the restaurant as the characters meet to mark the departure of Percival for India. She is likened to 'a creature dazed by the light of a lamp ... She has the stealthy yet assured movements ... of a wild beast' (*TW* 80). This could link her to the *Fauve* movement, although the colour imagery associated with Susan contains little of the brightness characteristic of this movement and is more appropriate for Jinny. It is possible to suggest that in presenting us with Susan, Woolf was, at least initially, presenting the reader with a character linked to her sister Vanessa Bell, or rather her art, for Frances Spalding notes in her biography of Vanessa Bell: 'The secret of Charleston's colourfulness lay in its use of grey'. Spalding goes on to note, 'This mid tone, unlike white, allows other colours to retain their strength without making them look brash. It is also sympathetic to light which it both absorbs and mutedly reflects'.[59] Susan's day is 'grey, green and umber' (*TW* 67). Everything is muted. It is fair to suggest that the harsh, primitive conditions at Charleston provoke parallels between Vanessa and Susan. Susan speaks of her affiliation with the country: 'I like to be with people who twist herbs, and spit into the fire' (*TW* 88). She rejects the world of the restaurant as the world of Jinny (which is an indication of her failure to fully appreciate this character). Her desires are simple and her understanding consciously limited, 'The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate,

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[58] The English artistic community had a notable interest in peasant culture which influenced the 'Arts and Crafts' movement which, in turn, arguably influenced Roger Fry's Omega Workshops. Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, p. 159.
[59] Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, p. 159.

rage and pain' (*TW* 88). All seem to represent a form of direct expression which was associated with Primitivism. Perry states that:

> Following certain Romantic notions developed by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Herder ... , this tradition assumed that there was a relationship between 'simple' people and more direct or purified expression; it exalted peasant and folk culture as evidence of some kind of innate creativity.[60]

As Susan says that she will be borne higher on the backs of the rhythms of the seasons, she seems, like all the other characters in the novel at this point, assured of the superiority of her way of life. Although, like Jinny, Susan is not a sacrificial victim as such, she does seem to be sacrificed to the rhythm of the seasons in a way that recalls Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Woolf may well be indicating the ultimate limitations of Jinny's and Susan's priorities if pursued without regard to other aspects of the Modern. Yet Susan's choice of Primitivism is also a rejection of Percival, the heroism he stands for and his representation of the order of civilized mythology: she is not drawn to the immediate past.

Neville, who exhibits a very profound connection with the civilized mythology of Percival, could not be more the opposite of Susan. As part of Woolf's examination of the different facets of Modernism, Neville demonstrates a close affiliation with Classicism, similar to that already noted in Diaghilev's work, and this allows Woolf to examine one of the major areas of interest in the European art world; one which was of interest to Modernist practitioners in general. Earlier chapters of this thesis consider the influence of such thought on Roger Fry in the years leading up to and following the 'First Post-Impressionist Exhibition'. However, the question of the status of

Classicism initiated a major European debate which was particularly fervent in France. David Cottington, in *Cubism in the Shadow of War*, outlines its importance. He quotes Paul Serusier: 'If tradition is to be born in our time, it is from Cézanne that it will come ... not a new art, but a resurrection of purity, solidity, *classicism*, in all the arts'.[61] The impetus behind the revival of Classicism would seem to have been the desire for order and precision and Woolf's character Neville is, from an early point, associated with such a desire. In the opening lines of the novel, when he first notes the cold stones, he states, 'I feel each one, round or pointed, separately' (*TW* 7). As he begins to define his character he does so by rejecting the less precise actions of Bernard and, as he conjugates the verb, he understands, 'There is order in this world' (*TW* 14). Neville's rejection of Bernard, who has responded to emotional stimulation, shows his rejection of what he identifies as a 'romantic' response. Neville rejects the Romantic world of nature, stating that it is 'too vegetable, too vapid. She has only sublimities and vastitudes and water and leaves' (*TW* 35). In doing this he is also rejecting Primitivism. Maurice Denis had stated in 'From Gauguin and Van Gogh to Classicism', 'We replaced the idea of "nature seen through the temperament" with the theory of equivalence and of the symbol',[62] which helps to define Neville's perceptions. Bernard knows that, 'above all he [Neville] desires order, and detests my Byronic untidiness' (*TW* 61), a comment which again aligns Bernard with a Romantic aesthetic at this stage and shows Neville reacting against this.[63]

In the novel, Percival is always associated with order and it is no surprise that in spite of his other, rather Romantic associations, Percival comes

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[60] Gill Perry in *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*, p. 6.
[61] David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905 - 1914* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 60.
[62] Maurice Denis, 'From Gauguin and Van Gogh to Classicism' published in *L'Occident* (1909), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds.), p. 53.
[63] Richard Jenkyns, in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 300, noted the Pre-Raphaelite's rejection of classicism. They are arguably late Romantics.

to represent the Classical to Neville. Kandinsky's statement that, 'those who follow Greek principles in sculpture reach only a similarity of form, while the work remains for all time without a soul',[64] seems relevant both to Neville's creation of the image of Percival in his imagination and for his re-assessment of Classicism in the later stages of the novel. The French writer Emile Bernard, one of the driving forces behind the Maurrasian branch of French Classicism, stated, 'the maintenance of an aristocracy is the moral life of the nation; without aristocracy, all becomes useless: art, piety, virtue, learning; only brute force and money remain'.[65] While it would not be accurate to suggest that Neville exhibits any kind of interest in the aristocracy, he does need something to fulfill the role that Emile Bernard ascribes to this institution. Initially, it is Percival who fills this role for Neville; the sections following Percival's death show Neville's devastation. They also record his isolation and perhaps the fact that his Classical dream on its own is not enough. Woolf, in her biography of Roger Fry, had noted 'While sur-realism and romanticism swept the surface, he [Fry] felt more and more "left alone on the deserted island of orthodox classicism"'.[66] Here, again, links with Diaghilev are possible, for Woolf, like Diaghilev, seems to be considering the possibilities of Classicism in Modern aesthetics. As we have seen, this had become part of Diaghilev's field of investigation in the 1920s, and yet just as Neville feels 'left alone', so Diaghilev's flirtation with Classicism provided ballets which seemed isolated and out of place to an audience who had by this point become almost accustomed to the *Ballets'* more radical, Modern repertoire.

Louis often seems similarly isolated and yet he has much more in common with the other characters than Neville. Louis is, like Jinny and Susan,

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[64] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* p. 23.
[65] David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War*, p. 61.
[66] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry*, p. 237.

profoundly interested in rhythm. His first statement is 'I hear something stamping. ... A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps and stamps and stamps' (*TW* 6). Yet Louis's sensitivity to rhythm is different from Susan's, and it is this difference that is important for an understanding of his cultural stance and his connections with the ballet. Rhythm symbolizes for Louis understanding of the importance of a historical and mythical past for an evaluation of culture. In her presentation of Louis, Woolf has linked this to his understanding of Percival. Yet, Louis's sense of culture lies not entirely in the grail legends of Western Europe or in the myths of ancient Greece or Rome, but in the ancient cultures of the middle east as well. In the first section, Louis states 'my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile' (*TW* 8), while his references, in the same speech, to the flowers with their stalks which 'rise from the black hollows beneath' accompanied by his perception, 'my roots go down to the depths of the world' (*TW* 8), provoke memories of Greek and Roman myths such as the story of Persephone. It has been noted that a significant proportion of the work of Diaghilev's company was motivated by an understanding of the myths of the past and this did not just rely on native Russian mythology. Pospelov notes that in Natalia Goncharova's style, there was 'an expressive tendency towards antiquity and the Orient'.[67]

While understanding of primitive myth is an important part of Louis's perceptions and his recognition that 'we have inherited traditions' (*TW* 39), the 'stamping' (*TW* 6) of the beast continues throughout the rest of the novel. It is significant that in spite of his desire not 'to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock' (*TW* 14), Louis finds himself in the city long before Bernard and Neville. For Louis, life is divided into two sections, the world of the past with its dreams and the world of the present. At the end of the school section, he asserts, 'I will achieve in my life ... some gigantic amalgamation

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[67] Gleb Pospelov, 'The Diaghilev Seasons and the Early Russian Avant-Garde,' in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes*, ed. Ann Kodicek, p. 107.

between two discrepancies so hideously apparent to me' (*TW* 36). For Louis, this attempt begins when he is forced to miss out on university which might have furthered his knowledge of past civilizations, and has to embrace the world of the city. Louis's impressions of London are ones based on sounds and images which seem to create a Futurist aura of frenzied motion. He notes, 'They pass the window ... incessantly, motorcars, vans, motor-omnibuses; and again motor-omnibuses, vans, motor-cars – they pass the window' (*TW* 62). Later he will note, 'all are merged into one turning wheel of single sound' (*TW* 91), and will state that 'All separate sounds – wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merry-makers – are churned into one sound, steel blue, circular. Then a siren comes' (*TW* 91). Such comments are interesting because they seem to connect with the theories of the Futurists. Russolo had noted that, 'with the invention of the machine, Noise was born. Today, Noise triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibilities of men'.[68] Louis's attention to sounds turned into colour and even image seems to hint at Futurist experiments with synaesthesia, and such interests can also be detected in the *Ballets*' aesthetics. Similarly, when Louis is presented in a café surrounded by the mundane items of modern living, we are reminded of the essential qualities of a Futurist drama or a Cubist collage. Garafola, writing about the impact of Futurism on the *Ballets Russes*, stated that it 'posited new relationships between the performer and a large stage environment ... and urged the vanguardist to comb the modern world ... for raw material'.[69]

Yet Louis, for all the attention he gives to the life of the city, does not feel the kind of exhilaration that is characteristic of Futurist practitioners and just as, for the Russian Ballet, *Parade* with its Cubist sympathies had been the outcome of the experiments with Futurism, so in *The Waves*, Louis comes to be associated with the Cubist movement. The imagery used in connection with

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[68] Caroline Tisdall and Angela Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), p. 111.
[69] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 77.

Louis in the London sections of the novel serves as a reminder of Cubist experiments with collage. Picasso's 'Au Bon Marché' and 'La Suze' are worth mentioning here. In the former work, Picasso presents us with a glass, decanter and box. Part of the picture is made of newspaper cuttings which are significant to the picture's message. 'La Suze' presents us with similar images from everyday life made out of every day items. Cork notes Picasso's use of newspaper in 'Guitar, Sheet-music and Glass' in his study of war art, *A Bitter Truth*.[70] Woolf and Bloomsbury became very familiar with the works of Picasso in the nineteen-twenties, and Shone records that Picasso visited Omega in 1919.[71] (This was at the same time as Bloomsbury's involvement with the *Ballets Russes*.) Louis's use of geometric imagery implying rings and circles reinforces the link with the Cubists.[72] Louis is painfully aware of the lack of order in the world he watches, and his desire is to create meaning through unity. The table with the sauce bottle and the book combine with the people and the snippets of the conversation that the men are having about the sale of the piano. What we seem to have here is the set of a cubist play, and significantly, Louis notes the rhythm: 'The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring' (*TW* 63). For Louis the rhythm is undeniable, but here it is also 'cheap and worthless' (*TW* 64). The answer is in the book, the symbol of the mythical past, but Louis cannot make the poetry accessible to the modern world. He might understand Plato and Virgil, but the people in his modern world never will. The image of the sauce bottle and the book is an attempt to combine the two situations, and this is a motivation that provides another connection with Diaghilev, for while Diaghilev experimented with Futurist and Cubist ideas, Garafola notes that he 'never completely abjured the past, even in these years of modernist

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[70] Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, p. 21.
[71] Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, p. 188.

experiments'.[73] She goes on to suggest that the two ideas were merged in the work of Larionov and Gontcharova. The ideas of these artists working for the *Ballets* were basically neo-primitive and yet Garafola claims that 'With Larionov and Gontcharova, futurism impregnated all aspects of ballet design'.[74] So, it must be Louis's task to 'make a steel ring of clear poetry that shall connect the gulls and the women with the bad teeth, the church tower and the bobbing billycock hats as I see them when I take my luncheon and prop my poet ... against the gravy-splashed bill of fare' (*TW* 86). Here the images combine to suggest the merging of different ideals and yet Louis notes in connection with himself and Rhoda, 'The weight of the world is on our shoulders; its vision is through our eyes' (*TW* 114).

And Rhoda is perhaps the most radical of the characters. Both literally and figuratively Louis's companion, Rhoda also demonstrates an understanding of the powers of geometrical symbols to provoke understanding through her experience following Percival's death. Yet, while Rhoda does seem to express some of the same ideas as Louis and so could be seen to identify with Futurism and Cubism, it is possible, I think, to recognize in Rhoda a growing affiliation with the ideas of more abstract art and also with Surrealism, and this needs to be looked at before we consider her more profound links with Wagner, Diaghilev and the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Rhoda's initial imagery is what links her with Louis and suggests Futurist and Cubist connections. These reach maturity in her experience of Percival's death where her understanding of the 'square of the oblong' provokes connections with Diaghilev's experience of such ideas in the Futurist theatrical productions which arguably influenced his war time and post-war work. Hints of a nascent

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[72] Francis Frascina, 'Realism and Ideology: An Introduction to Semiotic and Cubism', in .C. Harrison, F. Frascina, G. Perry (eds.), *Primitivism, Cubism and Abstraction*: pp. 87 – 100. This section provides an interesting introduction to the ideas of Cubism.
[73] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 82.
[74] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, p. 84.

Surrealism in Rhoda are present early on, and it must be noted that together with Dadaism, Futurism was closely associated with the birth of Surrealism. In Woolf's depiction of Rhoda the image of the clock in the first section is important:

> The clock ticks. The two hands are convoys marching through a desert. The black bars on the clock face are green oases. The long hand has marched ahead to find water. The other stumbles among hot stones in the desert (*TW* 14-15).

This is an image also associated with Louis and with Neville, the representatives of Cubism and Classicism respectively. Like Louis's, Rhoda's world is the world of the imagination; however, Rhoda's dreams are usually linked to her lack of a self-image. When Rhoda looks in the mirror what she sees is unsettling, for looking in the mirror at school, she says 'I have no face' (*TW* 29). She longs for night that she may 'put out the light and lie suspended on [her] bed above the world' (*TW* 38), and the night dream world supplies a freedom that the day does not allow. At night she can dream that she is a Russian Empress waving a fist at the crowd. She can in fact fill the space in the mirror by assuming the face / identity of another character. Dream imagery is an important part of her developing surrealist stance.

After school, Rhoda's life is still full of dream imagery, 'Pools lie on the other side of the world reflecting marble columns' (*TW* 71). This sort of imagery hints at connections with the Orphist work of someone like Dino Campana, who had also been associated with Futurism. In 'The Night' he had written, 'I recall an old city, red-walled and turreted, parched on the boundless lowlands in scorching August, with the distant coolness of green and wet hills in the background'.[75] This seems not unlike Rhoda's experiences in Spain. Briony Fer says, 'Women, for the Surrealists, were closer to that "place of

madness," to the unconscious than men were'.[76] This is significant for Rhoda who feels, 'I am broken into separate pieces; I am no longer one' (*TW* 72). Earlier Rhoda had envisaged herself sitting by the stream collecting flowers, a vision of Ophelia, which hints at madness which in turn suggests Surrealism. When Rhoda enters the restaurant for the farewell meal with Percival, she finds herself the centre of attention, noting, 'We cannot sink down, we cannot forget our faces' (*TW* 72). Suicide is Rhoda's eventual fate and one that was, as we have seen in the discussion on Septimus Smith earlier in this thesis, very much a part of Surrealism. For Rhoda, to live means to assume a false identity, to act a part, for she would need to combine the various elements that make up her life to form an identity. Another desire of hers is to blend into her surroundings which was very much a concept linked to those of Diaghilev's ballets with Futurist leanings.

Of course, combination is important and this is something that Rhoda has learnt through her interpretation of Percival, and particularly through the experience of his death. Percival is vital to her understanding and to her ability to develop. To Rhoda, the loss of Percival allows the shapes that are formed by a combination of music, action and image, to provide her with a transcendental experience. The moment of understanding for Rhoda comes when she attends presumably an operatic performance, suggesting an actual link with Wagnerian concepts. Rhoda's choice of entertainment is important. She could have chosen to go to the museum which she notes will provide her with the shape, 'they keep rings under glass cases' (*TW* 108); she contemplates the possibility of visiting Hampton Court, wondering: 'There shall I recover beauty, and impose order upon my raked, my dishevelled soul?' (*TW* 109). Yet her rejection of both venues suggests that Percival's death has made her feel that the visual alone is not enough to impose order. In recognizing, 'There is a

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[75] Thomas Harrison, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance*, p. 32.
[76] Ruth Brandon, *Surreal Lives: The Surrealists 1917 – 1945*, p. 176.

hall ... where one hears music' (*TW* 109), Rhoda acknowledges the importance of combining music with the visual. Percival is lost and yet experience of his death provides understanding, for Rhoda asks:

> What is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? ... Percival, by his death has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling place (*TW* 110).

This 'thing' is very much one which involves movement and one which excludes traditional symbols in favour of geometrical shapes. It is also significant that Rhoda associates the outcome with a dwelling place, which suggests that the place for meaningful combination is the theatre. It is also important to note that having experienced this she states, 'The structure is visible. We have made a dwelling place' (*TW* 110), stating not only that structure is important but also, through the use of the word 'we', that she is now included in this movement. It is at this point that Rhoda is able to lay Percival to rest and as she goes to throw her violets to Percival, she experiences a feeling of freedom. Indeed, the performance that Rhoda sees seems not unlike the ballet in that careful attention is paid to the movements of the characters and to the shapes created. It is only the references to singing that ultimately suggest opera, and it must be remembered that Diaghilev's company had its foundations in opera and that Diaghilev was, of course, interested in the transition of the ideas of *Gesamtkunstwerk* which came from the opera to their use in the ballet. There is a recognition of transition on Rhoda's part too and the ideas Woolf expressed here arguably acknowledge the possibility of *Gesamtkunstwerk* while the presentation of Rhoda, like the presentation of all the other characters, provides clear connections with the theories of the *Ballets Russes*.

Moreover, while it definitely is possible to suggest that Woolf is using the characters in *The Waves* to represent aspects of Modernism and specifically areas that were of interest to Diaghilev's company, Woolf's connections with the ballet company seem to be more far reaching than this. The concept of the combination of methods and ideas to provide an example of *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be seen not just in the conception of individual characters, but in the structure of the novel as a whole. This is why it is important to look at Forster's comments in his 1941 Rede Lecture, where he identifies the question: 'Can she create character?' as Woolf's 'problem's centre'.[77] He goes on to say:

> There seem to be two sorts of life in fiction, life on the page, and life eternal. Life on the page she could give; her characters never seem unreal, however slight their lineaments, and they can be trusted to behave appropriately. Life eternal she could seldom give; she could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered ... What wraiths, apart from their context, are the wind-sextet from *The Waves* ... They speak no more to us or to one another as soon as the page is turned.[78]

Forster's suggestion that Woolf's characters cannot live outside the context in which she places them is a significant one. His musical reference to them as a wind-sextet is actually the most telling thing here, making his use of the word 'problem' rather suspect. Arguably Woolf did not intend to create characters who could exist apart from the novel. Her characters are an intrinsic part of the novel's fabric. They are intended to be dependent on all the other parts of the novel. Each character has a distinctive way of thinking, standing and moving, yet they are also part of a collective exploration of Modern ideas and techniques. Again, Fry's comments, this time on Larionov, seem relevant. In

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[77] E. M. Forster, *Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), p. 16.

talking of the latter's costume designs, Fry had stated 'the movement of the figure ... is the fundamental fact in his design',[79] and said 'in treating human beings he has an eye to the type of movement characteristic of the particular individual'.[80] This is particularly apparent when Woolf's characters walk into the room for the farewell dinner with Percival, a character who, as has been noted, is defined almost solely through his actions. We are presented with a series of tableaux which form different rhythmic pictures. Neville notices 'That is Louis hesitating there. That is his strange mixture of assurance and timidity' (*TW* 80), while Louis notes that Susan 'stands for a moment at the swing-door, looking like a creature dazed by the light of a lamp. Now she moves, she has the stealthy yet assured movements ... of a wild beast' (*TW* 80). Rhoda's movements reflect her self-effacing self-consciousness: 'Rhoda comes now, from nowhere, having slipped in while we were not looking. She must have made a tortuous course, taking cover now behind a waiter, now behind some ornamental pillar, so as to put off as long as possible the shock of recognition' (*TW* 81). Jinny is always associated with movement. In tableau, when she enters the restaurant, 'she seems to centre everything; round her tables, lines of doors, windows, ceiling, ray themselves, like rays round a star in the middle of a smashed window-pane. She brings things to a point, to order' (*TW* 81). The image is disturbing because, in her very different way, she seems to have a similar impact to Percival. Jinny's movements are very characteristic: 'the rays ripple and flow and waver over us, bringing in new tides of sensation' (*TW* 81), while Bernard is characterized by his apparent nonchalance. Yet each character has a part to fulfil in the scheme of the novel in much the same way that a dancer performs a part in a ballet or an actor plays a part on the stage, and each character is defined by reference to the

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[78] E. M. Forster, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 16.
[79] Roger Fry, 'M Larionow and the Russian Ballet' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 291.
[80] Roger Fry, 'M Larionow and the Russian Ballet', p. 291.

others. The whole novel seems to be infused with a sense of the theatrical, of the composition involved in any collective performance. Indeed, they need not only each other but also the interludes, the settings and the rhythms of the prose in order to communicate.

An interest in the stage has already been noted in *To the Lighthouse*, yet in *The Waves* the connection is obviously even more relevant. Woolf's early comments on Wagner provide an indication that she thought carefully about stagecraft and Garafola charts Bloomsbury's interest in the stage in the later sections of her book on Diaghilev. As I have noted in an earlier chapter, she makes it clear that initial impressions of *Ballets Russes* stagecraft by critics such as Fry and Bell were not necessarily favourable. They felt that the dance and music were so radical that they were let down by the stage sets.[81] Yet this in itself suggests that Bloomsbury was thinking about the theatre as a forum for a piece where several arts would combine to produce a total artwork, and such an interest has clearly permeated *The Waves*. In this novel the first sense we get of a theatre is in the interlude that begins the novel. This and the ones that follow provide a kind of backdrop. It is interesting to note how Buckle states that in about 1911, Diaghilev had had the idea of using 'symphonic entr'acts. ... a painted curtain would be lowered to keep the audience quiet while the music played'.[82] It is also possible that Woolf's knowledge of Bloomsbury's experiments with stage sets through Omega at the time of its flirtation with Diaghilev's company may have influenced *The Waves*. Richard Shone makes clear the impact that contact with this ballet company had on Bloomsbury painters, concentrating on Duncan Grant's *The Queen of Sheba*, painted in 1912, and describing:

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[81] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 317–319.
[82] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev*, p. 189.

> its brilliant Russian Ballet clothes, its wide proscenium arch, and the necks of the camels echoing the rhythms of the hands and arms of Solomon and Sheba.[83]

He states that 'the influence of the Russian Ballet on Duncan Grant's painting was deep and lasting, especially in figurative decoration for the next twenty or thirty years' (p. 96). He also notes Grant's work in the theatre was influenced by this. Grant experimented with a long scroll that he painted; it was unwound to music. Shone states that 'Duncan had read in a newspaper of a concert of Scriabin's music which was accompanied by changing lights' (p. 141). This is worth mentioning because it is another example which suggests Bloomsbury interest in the combining of arts, and it once again indicates that the theatre provided inspiration. By 1918, Bloomsbury painters had once again come to the attention of Diaghilev. Shone notes that there was a rumour that Diaghilev would commission the Omega Workshops to design sets and costumes for the ballet (p. 180), and Collins, in *The Omega Workshops*, records that:

> Fry had been in contact with Diaghilev on the latter's visit to London in September 1918, and plans were aired for the Omega to design a ballet for the Russian impresario. With this in mind, Fry went to the Russian ballet productions of *Soleil de Minuit* and *Contes Russes* in November and December, and was captivated by the stage designs of Michael Larionov. Larionov had been represented by a single oil painting in Fry's Second Post Impressionist exhibition of 1912.[84]

All the above statements hint at Bloomsbury's awareness of the ballet company's concepts of staging and the mention of Larionov by Collins provides another important connection.

In commenting on Larionov's stage designs, Fry had praised the painter's 'power of using colour and form with a double meaning, first as pure

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[83] Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, p. 96.

design, and secondly as a means of evoking vague suggestions and flavours of time and place', and had added, 'that makes him so consummate a designer for theatre'.[85] Woolf's technique in *The Waves* would seem to be similar. The structures of the house and garden at the beginning are suggested by the children's comments such as 'Look at the spider's web on the corner of the balcony' (*TW* 6), and 'burning lights from the window-panes flash in and out on the grasses' (*TW* 7). Woolf places us in a representative world rich with suggestion. The opening section is interesting because it begins with a series of comments on the shapes of the things the children see, suggesting that form is fundamental to the understanding of the world. Bernard sees a ring, Neville a globe, Jinny a tassel, Susan a slab. This suggests that shape and form can be defined or sensed before names are given to objects. It suggests communication without words. The children's ability to single out and define objects is aided by their ability to perceive colours, so Woolf is in fact assessing the importance of the things that Fry considered so crucial in Larionov's work. Woolf provides a very clear Modernist stage set for her characters to function in. Fry said of Larionov, 'M. Larionow's stage designs support the choreographic design',[86] and this, too, is relevant to Woolf, for each of her settings evokes, perhaps even more clearly than in *To the Lighthouse*, a sense of design which has as its basis the square on the oblong image revealed to Rhoda following the death of Percival, a design which seems so close to Diaghilev's experiments with Futurism.

However, Woolf's connection with the theatrical concepts experimented with by the *Ballets Russes* would seem to go further, because, as I have noted while looking at Jinny, Woolf was also in this novel experimenting with the idea of rhythm. As she was writing *The Waves* in 1930, Woolf had stated:

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[84] J. Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, p. 168-9.
[85] Roger Fry, 'M Larionow and the Russian Ballet' in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 293.

> What it wants is presumably unity; ... Suppose I could run all the scenes together more? - by rhythm, chiefly. So as to avoid those cuts; so as to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end.[87]

In 1927, Woolf had criticized Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* for not paying enough attention to the idea of pattern and beauty in his section on rhythm.[88] Irina Vershina, in 'Diaghilev and the Music of the Saisons Russes', quotes Bakst:

> The secret of our ballet lies in the rhythm ... we have found it possible to communicate not feelings and passions, as in drama, and not form, as in painting, but the actual rhythm of feelings and form. Our dances, our settings, our costumes - they are all so exciting because they reflect that most elusive and secret thing - the rhythm of life.[89]

This could almost be a statement on Woolf's method in *The Waves* where rhythm forms a vital part not just of the movements of the characters, but of their world, their lives and the structure of the novel that gives them existence.[90] They are a vital part of a rhythmic structure. It is of course also possible that the *Ballets'* emphasis on and attention to rhythm was influential in this work which, in its very title, draws attention to the importance of rhythmic sound.

Yet I think that further connections can be made. Diaghilev's ideas of *Gesamtkunstwerk* are about combinations of the arts. Spencer, in *The World of*

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[86] Roger Fry, 'M Larionow and the Russian Ballet', p. 291.
[87] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 3, p. 343.
[88] Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Fiction' (1927) in *A Woman's Essays* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 124.
[89] . Irina Vershina, 'Diaghilev and the Music of the Saisons Russes', in *Diaghilev Creator of the Ballets Russes*, ed. Ann Kodicek, p. 76
[90] In addition, Eliot would note in 'The Music of Poetry' 'there must be transition between passages of greater and less intensity to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole', p. 32, and S.K. Tillyard records, in *The Impact of Modernism*, that at Ezra Pound's College, one faculty was given to rhythm, p. 71.

*Serge Diaghilev*, says that 'Diaghilev virtually abandoned the typically Russian narrative ballet for divertissement, in which any serious artistic quality, or experimentation, lay in the music or décor'.[91] Strikingly, in 1933, Roger Fry was formulating ideas which seem to comment on Woolf's ideas expressed in *The Waves*. Fry links architecture and music saying, 'music and architecture are able to create great formal constructions which satisfy our aesthetic faculties almost in the same manner as a mathematical proposition satisfies our intelligence'.[92] Music, as we have seen, enables Rhoda to detect an architectural structure at the heart of life, but it is music combined with movement and image, and Fry coincidentally seems to offer an explanation for Rhoda's experience while explaining the Post-Impressionists' assimilation of architectural theories for painting. He says that such works 'accept[] as data the fact that our aesthetic sense finds satisfaction in music through a series of rhythmic and harmonious relations of notes and in architecture in the rhythmic and harmonious relations of volumes in space'.[93] Similarly, both *The Waves* and Diaghilev's experimental ballets function by aiming to incorporate these ideas. The characters and dancers function as part of an aesthetic whole and are subordinated to its identity. Woolf's technique in *The Waves* is very much about the combination of sound and rhythm, image and symbols and character and action. The impact of this combination is important and can be seen most clearly in the Hampton Court section of the novel and in Bernard's final summation.

It is in the first of these sections that the characters, ever aware of the meeting that they had to bid farewell to Percival, and which provided a hint of the possibility of combination, reach an understanding of themselves without Percival. It is very much like a theatrical experience. We are presented with

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[91] C. Spencer, *The World of Serge Diaghilev*, p. 109.
[92] Roger Fry, 'The Double Nature of Painting', published 1969 from a lecture delivered in Brussels in 1933, in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 380.

the stage set: 'Behold the red chimneys, the square battlements of Hampton Court' (*TW* 141). This is important because it provides the image of the square combined with the oblong of the chimneys; it is necessarily architectural. We are also presented with the movement of the characters into a group, and as the section progresses, so we see the movement of the characters as they sit round the 'narrow table' (*TW* 142). They eat and then walk down the avenue in the formal gardens and finally make it to the terrace. Their movements and actions are accompanied by the rhythm of their thought / speech patterns which provide initially for reflection and then quicken to suggest connection as they had done in the section where they had met with Percival before he went to India. (Their progress is charted in much the same way that Woolf had noted the progress of the dancers when Rachel Vinrace had played at the dance in *The Voyage Out.*) Finally, there is the pattern created by the imagery, each character's images and symbols are taken up by the other characters. These combine into the square on the oblong formed by the palace, noted by Rhoda: 'like the quartet played to the dry and stranded people in the stalls, makes an oblong. A square is stood upon the oblong' (*TW* 154). This combines with Bernard's image of the flower, the same one that had been used when Percival left. The characters have now established their theories and roles in life. Percival is no longer needed for unity but their understanding of this has been occasioned by the fact that they have evaluated the message he sent to them and progressed from this just as Modernists examined the ideas of Wagner and redefined them to suit the Modern purpose.

In *The Waves*, Woolf has offered the reader a complex plethora of combinations of words, images and sounds. We are given the painted backdrops of the interludes, and in counterpoint we are presented with characters who speak in soliloquy, and who make the reader feel almost

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[93] Roger Fry, 'The Double Nature of Painting', published 1969 from a lecture delivered in Brussels in 1933, in *A Roger Fry Reader*, p. 385.

disconcerted by the fact that their mode of expression is more familiar to us when we are in the theatre. In addition, these characters are acutely aware of aural and visual sensations. This, combined with their rhythmic speech and the attention that is paid to the use of imagery, creates the impression of a total artwork. While the early sections seem to be exploring the ideas of Wagner, they examine them to reject or develop them as the *Ballet Russes* had done; for the novel is, in its conception, as radical as the music, dances, costumes and sets of Diaghilev's experimental ballets, and just as in the ballets these combinations worked to produce a total effect, a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* which would be destroyed if any of the parts were removed, so in Woolf's novel the different facets combine to create an aesthetic whole, her own form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

## Chapter 7: *The Years* and *Between the Acts*: Further Developments and Regressions?

*To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, as I have demonstrated, both suggest Woolf's interest in theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* which have their roots in Wagnerism. Both works show her experimenting with the theories involved in this aesthetic ideal. Similarly, it is possible to suggest that both record the influence of the Russian Ballet. However, it is in *The Years* that Woolf actually mentions Wagner and the ballet company. It is important to note that Woolf chooses to show Kitty watching *Siegfried* in 1910, the year she had once identified as the seminal year for Bloomsbury and for Modernism, and Kitty's response to the music is equally interesting, because she says it 'made her think of herself and her own life as she seldom did' (*TY* 175). Kitty's perceptions of the music are interrupted frequently by her concern with the audience. *Siegfried* may be her favourite opera, but her concern is more with what the audience is thinking, and Woolf's treatment of the opera here is rather ironical. The fact that the opera is taking place against the background of the imminent death of Edward VII, hence the frequent references to the royal box and to the possibility of the opera's being stopped should the expected event occur, seems to signal the end of an era. And just as the death of Percival in *The Waves* forced the characters to move on, so, in *The Years*, the death of the monarch, which of course took place in 1910, marks amongst other things, the end of one field of aesthetic investigation and the beginnings of a movement to modulate the experience of this field into Modern idiom. It is, therefore, no surprise to find in the later novel that by 1913, when Martin thinks of three possible topics of conversation to entertain a woman, it is the

Russian ballet that is in his list as he suggests, 'Racing; the Russian ballet; and … Ireland' (*TY* 238).[1]

The references to Wagner and to the *Ballets Russes* and the debate about these by the characters could lead us to believe that *The Years* is simply another examination of the various facets of Modernism and their emergence out of the theories and practices of the Victorian era. Indeed, this novel does seem to span a similar period of time to that which we might presume is covered by the lives of the characters in *The Waves*. It is also true that a rejection of Victorian ideas can be identified in this novel. The flowers, lilies and violets, which are mentioned at Mrs Pargiter's funeral in the 1880 section of the novel, the mention of the character Rose and the attention given in the portrait created of the dying woman to the depiction of 'a girl in white' (*TY* 44), suggest this Victorian world and hint at its demise. Indeed, Kitty, who prefers the rather Victorian *Siegfried*, sees herself in terms of a Pre-Raphaelite picture, for the narrator notes, 'Her hair had been red in those days; she was toying with a basket of roses' (*TY* 244). This, coupled with references made to looking-glasses, suggests the past age mentioned in the previous novels. The 'Morris wall papers and cabinets' (*TY* 50), and the references to Maggie and Sara round the bonfire in 1891 (*TY* 114), which provoke connections with the Watts picture that Woolf had mentioned in *A Passionate Apprentice*,[2] provide connections with the Victorian art movements founded on Pre-Raphaelite principles. In a similar way, the presentation of the character Edward has connections with a previous, yet different, way of life. The statement, 'He looked like a Greek boy on a frieze' (*TY* 47), and the suggestion a little later that he is 'like a Greek boy; strong; yet in some way, weak, needing … protection' (*TY* 52) serve as reminders, not just of Neville's Classical dream, but also of the

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[1] Martin's conversation with Ann does in fact involve them in a discussion on the ballet where they mention Nijinsky.
[2] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, Wednesday 20th September 1899, pp. 161-2.

part that Percival played in this, and *The Waves* has clearly demonstrated that Percival belongs to the past. However, while many of the ideas of the previous novels can be seen in *The Years* and while it could be said to continue Woolf's critical debate about Modernism, it is very different from the earlier novels and has been seen as a radical departure from Woolf's Modernist novels.

Indeed, in many ways *The Waves* was Woolf's last obviously Modernist novel, but it was not her final affirmation or examination of the ways in which synthesis and combination could produce the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. For while *The Years* may seem to indicate a crisis in Woolf's confidence in Modernism, it is in fact as radical in its combination theories as any of the earlier novels. Theories of critics who see this novel as reactionary centre on the belief that *The Years* seems relatively 'traditional' in its structural conception, and initially it is, indeed, worth examining *The Years* in relation to *The Waves*, because although they have things in common they do on the surface appear to be essentially different. So while *The Waves* and *The Years* both provide us with a group of characters whom we follow from childhood to maturity, they do this in very different ways. *The Waves* presents the reader with a novel made up almost entirely of soliloquies, with what amounts to painted entr'acts marking the passage of time. It is stylised and consciously experimental. *The Years* in comparison seems to suggest the world of realist writers that Woolf had rejected so fervently in the 1920s.[3] The main reason for such a conclusion stems, I think, from the inclusion of a historical dimension and detail in the novel. This places the reader in a particular world at a precise time. In *The Waves* there are very few hints as to exactly when the novel is set. It seems fair to suggest that the early parts of the novel are set in a mid-late Victorian world, but we cannot be more precise.

While some of Woolf's other novels can be placed quite precisely (we know that the action in *To the Lighthouse* takes place on either side of the Great War and we know that *Mrs Dalloway* takes place on a day in June in the years succeeding that war), what is different in *The Years* is the use of very exact dates as an integral part of the novel's structure, which ties the action to particular political events. It could be assumed that Woolf was writing a historical saga novel in the style of Galsworthy or Bennett.[4] On a superficial reading, it could be said that Woolf had regressed as a writer. For instance, Woolf's assertion in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', that the Edwardians create and define characters through their houses, is an interesting comment when considering *The Years,* a novel where the characters' house is very important.[5] It is perhaps significant that the house is most important in the early sections of the novel, in the years before the war. In fact, Woolf herself was aware of a departure in method in the writing of *The Years*. Comments made in the diaries show she was aware that the method she was using in this novel could be considered to be inferior to the methods adopted in the earlier works. On July 6th 1934, she records receiving a letter from Stephen Spender complimenting her on *To the Lighthouse* and states that she 'was made by that to think, have I written myself out'.[6] Yet *The Years* is ostensibly interested in the same ideas as *The Waves*: we have characters in action, painting, music and even the importance of the theatre, and both novels are in consequence, I think, concerned with the effect of combinations of the arts. It is possible to argue that *The Years* amplifies and extends such theories.

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[3] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, pp. 90-111, and 'Modern Fiction' in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, pp103 –110 are just two of the essays that chart Woolf's rejection of the Edwardian novel.
[4] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown', pp. 90-111.
[5] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown', pp. 90-111.
[6] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, July 6th 1934, p. 224. In Volume 5, Woolf describes the novel as 'such feeble twaddle – such twilight gossip … such a show up of my own decrepitude', (16.1.36), p. 8.

While Woolf expresses doubt about *The Years* and her role as a Modernist writer in the diaries, her comments here also suggest that she was dealing with new ideas. She likens the writing of this novel to a long and painful labour which suggests the birth of new concepts.[7] Additionally, in July 1934, she notes, 'I have to some extent forced myself to break every mould & find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel & think. Here in H. & N. I am breaking the mould made by the Waves'.[8] This comment suggests not a crisis of confidence in previous Modernist methods or a sense of *The Years* as in any way inferior to or less radical than the other novels, it seems to be indicating originality and progression. Indeed, the critical reception of the novel was largely favourable, and while some of the comments do suggest that readers found it more accessible than Woolf's previous work, this does not necessarily indicate that it was therefore less effective aesthetically. It is worth noting some of the comments. Within Bloomsbury, *The Years* was often preferred to Woolf's other novels, prompting her to write in her diary:

> The miracle is accomplished. L. put down the last sheet about 12 last night; & could not speak. He was in tears. He says it is "a most remarkable book – he *likes* it better than The Waves." & has not a spark of doubt that it must be published.[9]

Following the book's publication in 1937, she was able to note, 'Maynard said that he thought The Years very moving[;] more tender than any of my books; did not puzzle him like The Waves; symbolism not a worry; very beautiful'.[10] She records favourable reviews from critics outside Bloomsbury, stating, '2

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[7] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 10 Nov 1936, p. 31.
[8] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, 28th July 1934, p. 233. (H & N stands for Here and Now, the title Woolf gave to the novel while she was working on it.)
[9] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 5th November 1936, p. 30.
[10] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, pp. 77-8.

columns in the Observer praising The Years'.[11] The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer saw it as 'a creative, a constructive book'.[12] It is worth pointing out that Woolf herself was sceptical of this reviewer's feeling that 'it was merely the death song of the middle classes: a series of exquisite impressions',[13] because she suggests that she had more than this in mind when writing the novel. Indeed, by 19th March, she was able to state, '"They" say almost universally that The Years is a masterpiece. The Times says so. Bunny. &c: Howard Spring'.[14] And so Woolf was able to believe, 'my intention in The Years may not be so entirely muted & obscured as I feared'.[15] It is important to look at why *The Years*, which has frequently been seen as reactionary, received such a favourable reception in its day. It could be that it was simply more accessible than the erudite and experimental novel, *The Waves*. Perhaps Bloomsbury applauded it because it gave in many ways a picture of their lives. Yet I think that read in conjunction with Woolf's comments in the diaries which indicate the thinking behind the novel, *The Years* actually represents a development and reworking of ideas of combination dealt with in the earlier novels, and as such it is in fact as radical and as consciously Modernist as any of the previous works.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the importance that Woolf attached to the combination of the arts and particularly to the exploration of the possibility of a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory within a piece of literature. Both *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are interested in what knowledge of dramatic arts can add to such theories. And these ideas are pursued later; the use of theatrical metaphors and techniques form as significant a part of *The Years* as they had in the earlier novels. References to the theatre permeate the novel. In the 1880 section, as the family wait for the

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[11] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 14th March 1937, p. 67.
[12] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, p. 68.
[13] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, p. 68.
[14] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, p. 70.
[15] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, pp. 67-8.

death of Mrs Pargiter, Delia notes, thinking of herself and her father, 'We're both acting ... but he's doing it better than I am' (*TY* 37). Later as she watches her father leave the death bed, 'his arms with fists clenched out in front of him',[16] she feels, 'It was like a scene in a play' (*TY* 45). Morris's comments about their sitting in 'attitudes of suppressed emotion' (*TY* 42-43) also seems to suggest acting.

However, the preoccupation with theatre goes beyond mere metaphorical suggestion in this novel, for in August 1934, as Woolf was beginning to evaluate the lessons learnt from writing *The Years*, still at that point called 'Here & Now', she was able to assert:

> The lesson of Here & Now is that one can use all kinds of 'forms' in one book. Therefore the next might be poem, reality, comedy, play: narrative; psychology, all in one. Very short. This needs thinking over.[17]

This is interesting, not just because it mentions the possibility of transposing theatrical methods onto the novel, but because it shows that Woolf was already thinking about how a combination of methods could be used in her next novel, *Between the Acts*. However, since *The Years* was only in draft form when Woolf made these comments, it is conceivable that these comments indicate something that influenced the revisions she made in that novel. By September 2nd 1934, Woolf's language used to describe *The Years* has taken on a theatrical quality; she states, 'I am doing the scene where Peggy listens to them talking & bursts out'.[18] In November she writes, 'The thing is to contract: each scene to be a scene, much dramatized; contrasted; each to be carefully dominated by one interest; some generalised'.[19] In December Woolf

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[16] Like Woolf's own father and like Mr Ramsay. Mitchell Leaska, *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 63.
[17] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, 21st August 1934, p. 238. It is interesting that earlier in this diary entry, Woolf says, 'I dreamt ferociously all night; about Massine'.
[18] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, p. 241.
[19] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, 15th November 1934, p. 261. Woolf was in fact writing Freshwater at the time, p. 265.

writes of how completely the draft of *The Years* was rewritten,[20] and it is in the same entry that we can see Woolf's theatrical theories becoming even clearer:

> My idea is to <space> contrast the scenes; very intense, less so: then drama; then narrative. Keeping a kind of swing & rhythm through them all. Anyhow it admits of great variety – this book.
>
> I think it shall be called Ordinary People. I finished, more or less, Maggie & Sarah, the first scene, in the bedroom: with what excitement I wrote it! And now hardly a line of the original is left. Yes but the spirit is caught I think … I want to make both S. & M. bold characters, using character dialogue.[21]

We have here, the language of combination, drama and narrative, rhythm, character, in fact the language that has been noted in connection with Woolf's earlier novels. When she reached the end of her novel she declared:

> I think that the last chapter shd. be formed round N's speech: it must be much more formal; & I think I see how I can bring in interludes – I mean spaces of silence, & poetry & contrast.[22]

Further significant comments occur in 1936, where Woolf concludes, 'The Years has taught me something about scenes. But are they worth doing?'[23] which is connected with Woolf's feeling, 'it [*The Years*] seems to me to come off at the end. … Its different from the others of course: has I think more 'real' life in it; more blood & bone'.[24] Incidentally, it is also of interest that at the precise time that Woolf was seriously mentioning the novel as drama, T.S.

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[20] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, Sunday 30th December 1934, p. 266 – 7. Woolf states, 'I am re-writing considerably'.
[21] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, 30th April 1934, p. 266.
[22] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, 17th July 1935, p. 332.
[23] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 24th November 1936, p. 36.
[24] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 30th November 1936, p. 38.

Eliot was experimenting with the poetic drama, and Woolf records that she read *Murder in the Cathedral* in June 1935.[25]

In fact, further references in the diaries make even clearer the impression that when she wrote this novel, Woolf was thinking, perhaps even more clearly and profoundly, about the theatre and what theatrical technique could add to the technique of the novelist. Two comments are particularly important. The first quotation, taken from comments made on Wednesday 16th October 1935, is long, but crucial to an understanding of Woolf's continued investigation of the possibilities of theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in literature:

> What I have discovered in writing The Years is that you can only get comedy by using the surface layer – for example, the scene on the terrace. The question is can I get at quite different layers by bringing in music and painting together with certain groupings of human beings. This is what I want to try for in the raid scene: to keep going & influencing each other: the picture; the music, & the other direction – the action – I mean character telling a character – while the movement (that is the change of feeling as the raid goes on) continues.
>
> Anyhow, in this book I have discovered that there must be contrast: one strata, or layer can't be developed intensively, as I did I expect in The Waves, without harm to the others. Thus a kind of form is, I hope, imposing itself, corresponding to the dimensions of the human being: one should be able to feel a wall made out of all the influences; & this should in the last chapter close round them at the party so that you feel that while they go on individually it has completed itself. But I havent yet got at this. I'm doing Crosby – an upper air scene this morning. The rest of going from one to another seems to me to prove that this is the right sequence for me at any rate. I'm enjoying the sequence without that strain I had in the waves.[26]

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[25] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, 18th June 1935, p. 323. She said, 'having run through and tested my colour sense, I expect to be good'.
[26] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, p. 347.

Here, Woolf describes various layers she hopes to suggest, and it is important to examine this in the light of a comment she made in 1934 on Shakespeare:

> An idea about Shakespeare
> That the play demands coming to the surface – hence insists upon a reality wh. the novel need not have, but perhaps should have. Contact with the surface. Coming to the top. This is working out my theory of the different levels in writing, & how to combine them: for I begin to think the combination necessary. This particular relation with the surface is imposed on the dramatist of necessity: how far did it influence Shre [sic]? Idea that could work out a theory of fiction & on these lines: how many levels attempted. Whether kept to or not.[27]

It seems clear from the connection between 'surface' and 'reality' that for Woolf the surface level was closely related to realist theories, which she had played down in her four Modernist novels. Yet she suggests that the surface layer is of importance for *The Years*: *The Waves* had demonstrated that the novel did not necessarily need to address this surface layer in any great detail, but Woolf seems to be suggesting that in *The Years* this surface element will form an important part of the construction. This suggests the character in action part of dramatic technique. Both comments quoted above make reference to different layers, levels or strata within the novel. The 1934 entry examines the importance of combination of the levels, while the comment of October 1935, given first here, considers how these different layers can be achieved. Woolf's comments suggest that she is looking at the combination of painting and music which is interesting. If we are to define the aesthetic achievement of the possible combination of the elements mentioned in the above statements, it is necessary to establish the existence of each level in *The Years* first.

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[27] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, p. 207.

With this in mind, it is worth looking at exactly what Woolf achieved in the raid scene in *The Years*, as it is to this scene that she refers in the diaries. The first level, which Woolf associates with drama, clearly relates to action and therefore it is worth outlining the action of this 'scene' first. Indeed, the action is clearly structured. It begins with Eleanor making the final part of her journey to Maggie's house. She has, in fact, just got off the bus. We see her arrival at Maggie's, conversations between her and Renny and Nicholas, drinks, the start of dinner, concern over Sara's absence, the arrival of Sara, more small talk and then the start of the raid. The central section of the chapter describes the actions of the characters in the cellar during the bombing. Following the raid, pudding is served, more wine is consumed, conversation and small-talk are resumed, the guests prepare to go home and Eleanor finds herself on the omnibus going in the opposite direction. The scenes change and the action moves like a play; structurally it is not unlike *To the Lighthouse*. The action provides the surface layer, the layer that Woolf had said was the area of comedy, and this proves to be correct. Sara's description of North, 'his ears sticking out on either side of his pink, foolish face' (*TY* 272) and the combination of her use of reported speech and her actions point to comedy:

> '"Good," he said. "Good," "Good," until I took up the poker and tongs' – she took up her knife and fork – 'and played "God save the King, Happy and Glorious, Long to reign over us-"' She held her knife and fork as if they were weapons (*TY* 272),

It is now important to establish the place of painting and music within this section of the novel.

Within the raid section there are various sorts of pictures and images being created. The scene opens with the narrator's picture of the stasis of the frosty London night with only the movement of the searchlight which illuminates not the land, as Woolf's previous searchlights had, but the sky. Eleanor's torch illuminates 'a brick wall,' 'a dark green tuft of ivy' and 'the

number thirty' (*TY* 266), and the searchlight seems almost a grotesque parody of the little torch. The images and associations with blue create a series of almost surreal pictures. By contrast, the light inside the house is fierce and it is in this light that Eleanor begins to form her own pictures of the people around her as the searchlights of her eyes form spotlights that fall on the other characters. Thus, a picture of Nicholas is painted for the reader, 'He was very dark; he had a rounded head and dark eyes' (*TY* 267). The simplistic language here, and in the pictures of Renny 'carrying a tray with bottles and glasses' (*TY* 267), and Sara as she arrives 'her cheeks ... white here and red there' (*TY* 270) create simply defined images of the appearances of human beings rather like the images in Expressionist paintings.

However, Woolf's use of painting imagery in this scene is much more complex. Image is associated with identity. As Sara talks of North, the images mentioned earlier seem at odds with Eleanor's ideas: 'A picture came before her eyes – the picture of a nice cricketing boy smoking a cigar on a terrace' (*TY* 272). In fact, images seem to be associated in this section of the novel with the encapsulation of ideas and paradigms. So, to Eleanor, memory of the start of the war is encapsulated in the picture of herself, 'sitting on the same terrace; but now the sun was setting' (*TY* 272); both pictures seem to offer symbols of the pre-war world. Eleanor's picture of herself is in turn succeeded by the remembered words of the maid creating, with their visual quality, the patriotic image of 'the soldiers ... guarding the line with fixed bayonets!' (*TY* 272), which accompanies Eleanor's sense of her patriotic duty 'to protect those hills' (*TY* 272). The simple statements seem to imply an uncontroversial acceptance.

In spite of the apparent simplicity of some images, other painting references are not so unequivocal. Eleanor notices that the consumption of alcohol ensures that 'a little blur had come round the edges of things' (*TY* 274), and in such a world, 'the pepper pot's a dark moor' (*TY* 274), and:

> Things seemed to have lost their skins; to be freed from surface hardness; even the chair with the gilt claws, at which she was looking, seemed porous; it seemed to radiate warmth (*TY* 274).

The fact that Eleanor puts her changed feeling down not just to the wine but also to the realisation, 'it was the war' (*TY* 274), also emphasises the importance of this being a particular time; a change is taking place. In fact, Woolf's characters show awareness of two kinds of painting as so many of Woolf's previous characters had done. (For again, we can clearly see the ideas of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.) Indeed, the emphasis on brightness and light in the room in comparison with the blue of the light outside, hints at Post-Impressionism. During and immediately after the raid, Woolf's pictures also assume another interesting statement on painting. The raid forces the characters to move from the light of the basement where 'the table, with the gay china and the lamp seemed ringed in a circle of light' (*TY* 275) to the cellar where 'the light in the centre shone on glittering heaps of coal' (*TY* 276) and where 'the greenish-grey stone' (*TY* 277) of the walls makes them all seem 'whitish, greenish' (*TY* 278). It is interesting that in this light they all seem to offer very different images to the world and at the end of the raid they drink to the 'New World' (*TY* 278). As they return to the bright light of the dining room there is the general assumption that something has changed, just as the war would have an impact on the art movements of the century and particularly on the images that painters presented to the world. Painting is clearly of importance in this novel.

The other intention stated by Woolf in the diary entry was to include music. A cursory glance at this section will suggest that there is very little direct reference to specific pieces of music. Other sections of *The Years* seem to make music a far more significant part of their scheme; the waltz scene of 1907 is a prime example of this and is important not least because it identified waltz music as part of a social event. This is a reminder of the waltz in *The*

*Voyage Out*.[28] However, it is possible to assert that for Woolf music does not necessarily mean the naming of specific pieces of music, it is about rhythm and sound in general, while the very suggestion of different levels within an aesthetic whole suggests the different parts of a piece of music. The most direct reference to music in the raid section comes when a chair makes Eleanor recall Maggie's and Sara's mother, Eugénie, and they remember the waltz. In 1907 Sara had noted:

> The waltz music took the words 'calling and answering each other' and flung them out; but as it repeated the same rhythm again and again, it coarsened them, it destroyed them. The dance music interfered with everything (*TY* 129),

which is similar to Rachel Vinrace's message to the dancers. The dance music also lulls Sally to sleep which had been the effect of music in the earlier novel (*TY* 131). However, action and music are literally fused in Lady Pargiter's dancing later in this section, where 'all her limbs seemed to bend and flow in the lilt and curve of the music' (*TY* 137). When the waltz is mentioned in the raid scene, Eleanor notes that 'Sara was drumming a waltz rhythm on the table' (*TY* 274). The word 'drumming' hints at monotony and also at war. It seems, therefore, significant that this is in counterpoint with the 'long-drawn hollow sound' (*TY* 274) of the siren warning of the raid, provoking connections with Futurist experiments with sound which were taking place during the war years.[29] The waltz, the symbol of the old order, is interrupted by the Futurist sound of the siren. Indeed, while there are relatively few references to music, there are lots of references to sound, which suggest connections with Modern music. There are sounds from the streets, 'the rush of wheels' (*TY* 275) and the 'round of tapping feet' (*TY* 275). During the raid the 'profound silence' (*TY* 277)

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[28] The dance described in the 1907 section of *The Years* seems to owe much to Woolf's early description of a dance, 'A Dance at Queen's Gate' in Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, pp. 164-7. However, the comments in this novel are more negative than Woolf's early ideas.
[29] L. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, pp. 79-80.

is penetrated by the sound of the guns emphasised by the repetition of the words 'a gun boomed' (*TY* 276-7). After the raid, there is mention of a bugle sound and the characters are once again aware of 'the rush of wheels and the hooting of motor-cars' (*TY* 281). Then there is the sound created by the speech of the characters, a series of clipped and stunted phrases curtailed by ellipsis which suggests their uncertainty and is made rhythmic through repetition. Eleanor's protests are attributed to it being 'as if somebody had given her the wrong note' (*TY* 274), suggesting that modulation from the old to the new is difficult and even discordant. All these musical elements combine with the other layers, with images and action, to intensify the scene.

It is, therefore, possible to establish that the layers or levels that Woolf had stated she intended to have, music, painting and action, are actually there within this section of the novel. I now want to establish the nature of their combined influences. For further understanding of Woolf's method in this section of *The Years*, it is necessary to look at another comment made in Woolf's diary. In November 1935 she wrote:

> It struck me though that I have now reached a further stage in my writers advance. I see that there are 4? Dimensions; all to be produced; in human life; & that leads to a far richer grouping and proportion: I mean: I: & the not I: & the outer & the inner – no I'm too tired to say: but I see it: & this will affect my book on Roger. Very exciting: to grope on like this. New combinations in psychology & body – rather like painting. This will be the next novel after The Years.[30]

These ideas seem to develop the comments made in October of the same year which I quoted earlier. Clearly Woolf is beginning to define the different layers more precisely here. Previously they have been identified with artistic genre. Now Woolf is attempting a much more psychological approach. The first layer in Woolf's writing, the realist level that she associates with drama is

the one linked to action and direct speech established in her earlier comments. The fact that Woolf had stated in October that in *The Years* she felt it inappropriate to develop one stratum intensively as she did in *The Waves* implies, I think, that one layer suggested here must involve the sphere of consciousness or the human mind, as it did in the previous novel. This is associated with the painting idea or representational imagery. The third level is possibly the 'subconscious' or intuitive part of the mind and is possibly associated with music. This is also developed in *The Waves* but in a less obvious fashion. However, the November diary comment suggests that Woolf is in fact considering a fourth level (she calls it a dimension here). So, while it seems possible to associate the first level, the action, with 'the outer', and the second and third, painting and music respectively, belong to 'I' and the 'inner', what must now be considered is what Woolf meant by the fourth dimension, 'the not I'. Further examination of the raid scene is necessary to arrive at a definition of this dimension, and comments Woolf made in her 1926 essay, 'The Cinema',[31] contribute to our understanding of this concept.

The first hint of the fourth dimension comes in the opening section of the raid chapter. Here the action, the introduction of Eleanor to Nicholas and her part in the conversation that he is having with Renny, is coupled with the pictorial impressions that represent her conscious response to Nicholas. This in turn is combined with the sound-based stimulus of their conversation which is stilted and repetitious because Eleanor, as a woman, feels unable to join in their male discussion on war. However, the combination of action, image and sound does provide Eleanor with a sense of what could be the fourth dimension, for as Eleanor tries to join in the conversation, attempting to supply the end to unfinished questions, she is forced to note, 'She had no idea what they were talking about' (*TY* 268), and yet seconds later she realises, 'Suddenly ... words floated together in her mind and made an intelligible

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[30] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, Monday 18th November 1935, p. 353.
[31] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, pp. 268-272.

sentence. It seemed to her that what he had said was, "We cannot make laws and religions that fit because we do not know ourselves"' (*TY* 268). This is a momentary impression, but it is one that will return more forcefully through the combination of sound, image and action during and after the raid. During this part, the sound of the guns, and the almost surreal pictures that the dimmed light provides of the other characters in their strange and perhaps rather exotic costumes, allow the characters an almost transcendental experience, where the pictures, sounds and actions robbed of individual meaning transcend the egotism of the individual. Fusion of sound and image, such as 'there was a violent crack of sound, like the split of lightning in the sky' (*TY* 277), re-enforces the idea of combination of the arts to produce the fourth dimension, an idea that Woolf had been toying with for much of her career.

For Eleanor, the end of the raid and the return to the drawing room make her feel,

> as if another space of time had been issued to her, but, robbed by the presence of death of something personal, she felt – she hesitated for a word; 'immune?' Was that what she meant? Immune, she said, looking at a picture without seeing it. Immune, she repeated (*TY* 280).

Such thoughts are intermittent, but are developed further by connection with Nicholas, a connection which is coupled with the feeling of understanding Eleanor had at the beginning of the scene. Eleanor is thinking of the 'New World' (*TY* 281). In fact, the attempts that both she and Nicholas make to define the nature of this world are tied up in the idea of combinations:

> "The soul – the whole being," he explained. He hollowed his hands as if to enclose a circle. "It wishes to expand; to adventure; to form – new combinations?"
>
> "Yes, yes," she said, as if to assure him that his words were right (*TY* 282).

To Eleanor, the idea of combinations seems to introduce something new. Her final feeling of things having been formed into one whole comes in the final stages of the chapter. First it is associated with the feeling for Nicholas making 'one whole' (*TY* 284), and then with the feeling that she would have liked to marry someone like Nicholas. This in turn is modulated into her awareness of Maggie's and Renny's happy marriage and a transcendence of herself and her needs. What she senses is important:

> A broad fan of light, like the sail of a windmill, was sweeping slowly across the sky. It seemed to take what she was feeling and to express it broadly and simply, as if another voice were speaking in another language (*TY* 285).

The combination of pictorial and sound ideas, coupled with the action here, seems to demonstrate in essence the combination of ideas. In talking about cinematography in 'The Cinema' (1926), Woolf had noted the capacity it provided for the audience to 'see life as it is when we have no part in it',[32] and she reflects on the potential in cinematography for the combined use of image and music. Woolf examines the way in which an abstract shape projected on to the screen can seem to embody meaning. She says, 'For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words',[33] and looks at the potential of the art to create the sort of effect Shakespeare creates through the combination of images in his writing and through the rhythm of the words. She sees as the future of the cinema, the harnessing of:

> Something abstract, something which moves with controlled and conscious art, something which calls for the very

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[32] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, p. 269.
[33] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, p. 270.

> slightest help from words or music to make itself intelligible,[34]

and states that this will provide 'some new symbol for expressing thought.'[35] This idea seems not entirely irrelevant to *The Years*, where the characters' eye beams are like cameras, and which is actually looking at the possibility of a new symbol for expressing thought occasioned by combinations of action, image and sound. That Eleanor is able, through the combination of ideas, to forget the raid is evidence of Woolf's understanding of the power of this process as she experiments with the fourth dimension, 'the not I'.[36] The fact that the whole novel provides us with what may be seen as a series of short stories each becoming more individual and autonomous, so that it could almost stand on its own, and culminating in the party, adds to this perception. The novel's ability to change with such ease from one scene to another without losing its integral unity extends this inquiry further by suggesting the techniques of the cinema which, with its endless possibilities for combination, could arguably be seen as the ultimate forum for *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is thus that *The Years* represents an examination of the theory that is every bit as radical as Woolf's previous attempts at definition.

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While an examination of the raid scene in *The Years* seems to suggest the possibility of producing the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in literature through combining the arts, in her final novel Woolf seems intent on demonstrating that such a conception is impossible, in spite of the fact that the main elements necessary for combination are present. The experimentation with dramatic theory found in *The Years* can be found in Woolf's next novel, *Between the*

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[34] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', p. 272.
[35] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', p. 272.
[36] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 4, November 18th 1935, p. 353.

*Acts*. Comments made in March 1939 following Woolf's reading of Eliot's *Family Reunion*, a play in which the characters sound not unlike the characters in *Between the Acts*, suggest that theatre technique was still very much in her mind. Woolf, who did not like Eliot's play, stated that, 'the experiment with stylised chatter isnt successful. He's a lyric not a dramatic, but here theres no free lyricism. is caught back by the character: has no power to embody: stiff as pokers',[37] and she records being slightly relieved that the critical reception of Eliot's play was unfavourable. Yet she does state:

> Had it been a success would it have somehow sealed – my ideas? does this failure confirm a new idea of mine – that I'm evolving in PH about drama?[38]

This clearly indicates that Woolf's concerns for the theatrical were very important in her theory for *Between the Acts*. Of course, the theatre is used once again as a pervading symbol in the last novel. In fact, a play is used as a part of the novel's structure. The play used, however, is not an opera or the work of a great dramatist, it is an amateur work acted by what Shakespeare would have called a group of 'hempen homespuns' performing for their feudal lords in the way that Peter Quince's company performs for Theseus. But theatre is not confined to this performance in Woolf's novel. In many ways we are presented with all the elements of a play which Woolf's earlier novels seemed to suggest, provided the possibility for unity. And it is not just in the presentation of the pageant that this is apparent, for the lives of the characters are, at the end of the novel, likened to those of characters in a play by the words, 'Then the curtain rose. They spoke' (*BA* 160), which re-enforces the increasing number of theatrical allusions in the later stages of the work.

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[37] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, March 22nd 1939, p. 210.
[38] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, March 22nd 1939, p. 210. PH stands for Pointz Hall which had been Woolf's working title for the novel.

The presentation of the play is in fact just one of the ways in which Woolf's examination of the arts in this novel takes on what I think is a consciously negative stance. Comments in her diary seem to hint that the combination of the arts which she had grappled with in the previous two novels, and in part in the writing of *Roger Fry*, were not motivating factors in *Between the Acts*. She records:

> Here am I sketching out a new book; ... don't, I implore, lay down a scheme; call in all the cosmic immensities; & force my tired & diffident brain to embrace another whole – all parts contributing – not yet awhile. But to amuse myself, let me note: why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. discussed in connection with real little, incongruous living humour; & anything that comes into my head; but "I" rejected: "We" substituted ... "We" ... composed of many different things ... we all life, all art, all waifs & strays – a rambling, capricious but somehow unified whole.[39]

While the reference to 'cosmic immensities' and the fact that she begs not to be forced 'to embrace another whole' suggest that Woolf was demotivated by the struggle to produce a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the idea of a 'rambling, capricious but somehow unified whole' suggest that she is unable to forget it entirely. By December, Woolf was able to describe *Between the Acts* as 'a medley',[40] and the choice of word is important. When she had suggested the word 'rhapsody'[41] for *Jacob's Room*, she was in fact using a precise musical term given to a composition of irregular form. In using the word 'medley' to describe the later novel, she is using a far less exact term. The term medley is applied to a collection of musical piece from various sources; it is associated with the idea of a miscellany of different separate parts which are only loosely connected, and this is the pervading impression of the novel. Alex Zwerdling links the use of the word medley to the Renaissance scene, saying, 'The word,

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[39] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, April 13th 1938, p. 135.
[40] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 5, December 19th 1938, p. 193.

with its overtones of conflict and heterogeneous combination, is precisely chosen',[42] and goes on to examine the theme of disintegration in this last novel.[43]

There does seem to be evidence to suggest that when Woolf first started this last novel, she was not thinking in terms of creating a work in which unity was the main message as the April 1938 diary entry suggests. It seems fair to propose that in this final novel, Woolf is exploring, in the face of another world war, the final break down of all the ideas that she had associated with connection in her other novels. In fact in this work, theories of combination, synaesthesia and *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which had formed the connecting motivational impetus for Modernism seem to be being discredited by Woolf. She is looking at different arts, at painting, drama, music, and yet they remain separate. The possibility of connection is still a part of this novel, and yet combination is denied and the parts remain unresolved. So while *Between the Acts* seems to be using the ideas experimented with in the other novels, such techniques are being used ironically to suggest that ideas of unity and combination are a travesty. Discussion of drama is there, the three main levels of the previous novel are there, we have action, we have the conscious, painting, and we have the sub-conscious, music. However, and this is a key connection between this novel and its immediate predecessor, the fourth dimension is only fleetingly glimpsed so that ultimately we are left with a sense of disorder rather than unity. An examination of the different levels and their failure to merge is important for an understanding of this sense of disunity.

The first level, the action in the novel, is readily defined. The novel takes place during one June day in 1939 at Pointz Hall as the family prepares to host the annual play performed by the local community under the direction

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[41] Virginia Woolf, *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 2, June 23rd 1922, p. 177.
[42] Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 318.
[43] Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, p. 321.

of Miss La Trobe. However, while this one act, the contribution to a play, might lead the reader to believe that the characters are united in purpose, it is within this one defining feature that the action is fragmented as the characters pursue their own agendas, failing to comprehend their director's desire for unity; and the audience is similarly disunited. So all the characters experience only moments of connection which serve to make them more aware of their ultimate isolation. Woolf presents us with a plethora of minor happenings which include the normal functions of 'morning tea' (*BA* 13) and walks for the children (*BA* 15), juxtaposed with the usual preparations for a play, such as Lucy's nailing of the placard to the barn (*BA* 25). Within this structure of routine, there are the moments of personal conflict between Giles and Isa, between Lucy and her brother, and moments of connection, between Giles and Mrs Manresa. The major interruption to the day is, in fact, the arrival of Mrs Manresa and William Dodge who come without invitation (*BA* 33), but are relatively easily subsumed into the day's proposed event.

There are, however, aspects of the narration of routine events that are disconcerting, too, and hint at dislocation rather than unity, not least supplied by the fact that Woolf provides us with a day at Pointz Hall, but it is a day that begins in the evening, rather subverting the reader's expectations. What we appear to be getting is an inverted day, reminiscent of the inverted birth idea encapsulated in the image of the snake and toad which Giles kills. The preparations for the play are also disconcerting because they seem to have become so much a matter of routine that they lack meaning or importance. Isa records this when she notes that the words used to describe the preparations by her father-in-law and Lucy replicate those they had used the year before, like a little tune learnt by heart (*BA* 39). In fact the characters who live at the house seem to be acting and performing learnt roles, just as much as the local people. They have learned their parts and so, ironically, their action will become a part of the play when the actors hold up mirrors for them. Beyond their immediate

world is the violent action recorded in the newspapers. The action provides us with a series of dislocated pictures, which seem all the more fragmentary because of their positioning before, between and after the acts. Art is failing in the face of more pressing human concerns.

As in the other novels, there are also references to painting. The violent action of the newspapers is translated into pictorial images in the minds of the characters. The reported rape in the newspaper becomes a series of pictures in Isa's imagination: 'a horse with a green tail', 'the guard at Whitehall' (*BA* 21), which are embellished until the description of the rape is so real that, 'she saw … in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming' (*BA* 21). There are other emblems of Modern life too such as the plane which serves as a reminder not just of impending war but also of the Futurist movement. The use of mirrors is also important. Isa stands before the mirror to get 'three separate versions' (*BA* 16) of herself; Mr Oliver as he sleeps, sees 'as in a glass, its lustre spotted, himself, a young man helmeted' (*BA* 19), and Mrs Manresa uses a mirror to adjust her make-up, a literal painting image, as she creates the visual image she wants to present to the world (*BA* 101), yet the use of the mirror provokes connections with Victorian art as it had in *To the Lighthouse* - except here, the ideas are not as readily resolved. For the final use of the mirrors is to create fragmented images of members of audience which defy resolution.

The novel also looks at real painters and paintings. A picture's inability to communicate in a meaningful way is emphasised by characters such as Bart Oliver who tries to explain the importance of pictures by saying, 'That … was my ancestor. He had a dog. The dog was famous' (*BA* 41). The stilted nature of the sentences suggests rote learning while the notion of being painted with a famous dog and Mrs Manresa's attention to the horse compound the sense of the insignificance of human beings. It is also ironic that Bart wants to present

a picture like the one of his ancestor to the world; he, too, has a dog. Then again, William Dodge is introduced by Mrs Manresa as an artist (*BA* 34), and yet he fails to offer a satisfying interpretation of any of the art of the past. Dodge looks at one picture and the narrator notes the cold impersonality of art, 'The picture looked at nobody' (*BA* 39), which emphasises its inability to communicate with practitioners in the modern world. The fact that the painting of the woman that hangs by the staircase is unidentifiable implies art's inability to communicate in a way that human beings can understand. Other pictorial elements in the novel also seem to suggest a lack of connection. In *The Waves*, Woolf had suggested that images created through the presentation of images of character in action might provide a means of communication, a view often associated with the theatre. In fact, in essence, all references to paintings and painting imagery seem to point not to explanation but to confusion. Whereas in *The Waves*, the characters become part of their background as did the dancers in Diaghilev's ballets, in *Between the Acts*, 'The flat fields glared green yellow, blue yellow, red yellow, then blue again. The repetition was senseless, hideous, stupefying' (*BA* 54), and background seems in no way linked to the characters; it fails to support them and the audience cannot see any connection. There are two dimensions but they will not unite.

Even more prevalent in this novel than the references to painting are the references to the third dimension of sound and music, showing that Woolf is still interested in using musical ideas found in other novels. The image of the waltz, so important in *The Voyage Out*, is still there and yet it is much more negatively explored; for while Woolf examines the lure of music as she had done in *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*, investigating its intoxicating qualities, here she offers the characters no way out. In the Elizabethan scene the narrator notes, 'round and round they whirled, intoxicated by the music' (*BA* 73), and although such an idea indicates unity, it also emphasises their lack

of choice. Yet the characters in *Between the Acts* can cope with the waltz which they understand. However, they are prevented from the security of this by the inclusion of the jazz rhythms which are seen to be 'a cacophony ... an outrage ... an insult' (*BA* 134), so that where experiences relating to sound and music in the other novels seemed to suggest the possibility of unity, in this novel they seem to re-enforce the characters' awareness of the fragmentary nature of their lives. They are offered glimpses of unity which are characteristically broken, suggesting that the hope for lasting unity is easily destroyed.

*Between the Acts* is very much about the combination of sounds and about the gathering together of a medley of musical pieces shown in the pageant. Further indication of the power afforded to music is noted where music is used to summon the audience (*BA* 91). This is not unlike the power of music in the earlier novels. And music seems at this point to be linked to unity, it 'makes us see the hidden, join the broken' (*BA* 91). It is associated with understanding, 'the gramophone ... gently stated certain facts that everybody knows to be perfectly true' (*BA* 102). However, there is a pervading sense of scepticism in Woolf's use of music in this novel. It seems ironic that Isa, hearing the nursery rhyme 'Sing a Song of Sixpence' should feel 'O that my life could here have ending',[44] and that 'the little twist of sound could have the whole of her' (*BA* 133). Indeed. irony seems an important part of the conception of music in this novel, for while music is associated with transcendental experience, the character, Reason, in the play says with uncharacteristic unreasonableness, 'Music for me unfolds her heavenly harmony' (*BA* 94), and music is also associated with madness. The voices of the audience are said to form 'mad music' (*BA* 116) and it is this element that seems to be highlighted in this novel where music is used not just to foster unity but to aid separation when it is used to 'disperse' (*BA* 74 -5) the audience as well as to call them and

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[44] This is not unlike Mrs Dalloway's use of Othello's words.

is, therefore, associated with dislocation. During the play when the music stops, the characters all feel distinctly uncomfortable, 'All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music' (*BA* 131); and the gramophone, the mechanical replacement for the musicians, is no more reliable and cannot offer the certainty of connection which might provide comfort.

Yet it is music that saves the audience from the horror of the 'mirrored' present, and from the braying of the megaphone which seeks to point out the truth about their lives. The characters do not know what they are listening to at this stage, but it doesn't matter. The description of the music and its power over the characters at this point is revealing:

> Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second, the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's profundity came flocking ... from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder (*BA* 139).

This section, with its suggestions of polyphony, is extremely interesting. First, it seems to suggest that to be united by music is inevitable and involuntary. Second, it suggests that although pieces of music may be different, progression is predictable. Most important, however, is the suggestion of the different levels which must surely remind us of Woolf's diary comments when writing *The Years*. Here, we have the surface, the action level like the melody in music, and the sub-strata which deal with meaning, the harmony of the chords. However, the fourth dimension is only momentarily there and is

subsequently destroyed by the finite nature of art itself. Unity fails when the music stops.

This sense of the failure of art to provide lasting unity is important, and there is a sense of disharmony in Woolf's fiction here, for in the presentation of the day in the lives of the characters at Pointz Hall and of the pageant, a hopelessly ambitious amateur project, Woolf could be demonstrating the failure of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. All that the characters and the fictional actors achieve is a cacophony of sound with momentary patches of engagement like that achieved through the music in the 'ourselves' section of the play. There are momentary glimpses of architectural images of the sort envisaged by Rhoda, but nothing lasts. The fact that in her last novel, Woolf seems to be supremely aware of the importance of silence or non-expression seems to compound this theory. In the novel, moments of silence are continually disrupted. The opening page records the silence broken by the sound of the cow. In this noisy world, complete silence is unnerving. Later the room is described as, 'empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent' (*BA* 33) which echoes *Jacob's Room* and the central section of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf's interest in silence stems from an understanding that it tells of a time before and after human beings, and the vase in the room is 'the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence' (*BA* 33) because it tells us of the time when we shall have ceased to exist. The view provides opportunities for silent reflection, and yet the characters 'stared at the view as if something might happen in one of those fields to relieve them of the intolerable burden of remaining silent' (*BA* 53). Every silence is filled; the silence occasioned by the characters forgetting their lines during the play is filled with the audience's laughter. Silence is seen as something negative. Giles and Isa cannot communicate. In *Between the Acts*, art in the form of pictures, drama, music and literature, provides a diversion, something that prevents its audiences from having to face the reality of their own existence. So Woolf could be seen to be suggesting that art is only a

fleeting pre-occupation in the face of the real struggles of humankind, which are prefaced by the aeroplanes that fly overhead and which in their muted way prophesy war, and that all theories of combination are illusory.

And yet this is not I think Woolf's ultimate message. Even though she seems to be suggesting the failure of Modernist theories of combinations of the arts, *Gesamtkunstwerk* continues to be a preoccupation in this novel and Woolf is still, I think, asserting that it is a possibility. What she sees as impossible is the achievement of this at the time of writing, and silence is the key to this. The world of the novel is filled with 'scraps, orts and fragments' (*BA* 138); 'scraps, orts and fragments' of the action of the characters, 'scraps, orts and fragments' of pictures, 'scraps, orts and fragments' of music, 'scraps, orts and fragments' of the play, and ultimately and almost by default, 'scraps, orts and fragments' of silence. It is silence that is important, for it is through understanding and inclusion of silence that the fourth dimension might be understood. It is salutary to return to Woolf's experience of Wagner, for in 'Impressions at Bayreuth,' she had noted:

> No one can doubt that the audience at Bayreuth ... attend with all their power. As the lights sink, they rustle into their seats, and scarcely stir till the last wave of sound has ceased; when a stick falls, there is a nervous shudder, like a ripple in water, through the entire house. During the intervals between the acts ... they seem oppressed with a desire to disburden themselves somehow of the impression they have received.[45]

The Bayreuth audience instinctively senses the need for stillness and focus in order to gain this impression. In *Between the Acts* such focus on the part of the audience is never apparent, perhaps because it is only an amateur performance. And yet Woolf seems to be suggesting the inability of this audience to perceive any message based on combinations. 'Impressions at

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[45] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 289.

Bayreuth' adds further important comments, for Woolf states that between the acts:

> The sun draws out strong scents from the hay and the pine trees, and if one thinks at all, it is to combine the simple landscape with the landscape of the stage. When the music is silent the mind insensibly slackens and expands, among happy surroundings: heat and the yellow light, and the intermittent but not unmusical noises of insects and leaves smooth out the folds. In the next interval ... there is another act out here also.[46]

It seems to be in the blurring of the divisions between art and life that human beings can achieve their highest levels of understanding. The imagery here suggests that given the right conditions, combination can provide the key to communication and *Gesamtkunstwerk* is perhaps possible. In *Between the Acts* Woolf is not suggesting that the arts do not have the ability to produce a knowledge of what she called the fourth dimension which has been apparent to the audiences of Wagner's operas, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is still her preoccupation and the novel, in fact, constantly affirms that it is a possibility. However, unsettled by the threat of another world war, Woolf quite understandably doubts the ability of human beings to provide both the means and the forum for such combination. An appropriate stage is lacking. It remains the artwork of the future, as Miss La Trobe implies.

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[46] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Volume 1, p. 290.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

To conclude I think it is worth looking at Forster's *Howards End*, published in 1910, the year that Woolf initially felt was the moment when the Modern era began.[1] In this novel, which presents us with sisters who arguably are not too far removed from the inhabitants of Bloomsbury, Margaret Schlegel asks Leonard Bast, 'Do you think music is so very different to pictures?'[2] She then outlines the views of her sister, Helen, who 'declares they're just the same' (p. 52), and says that 'Helen's one aim is to translate tunes into the language of painting, and pictures into the language of music' (p. 52). Yet in Margaret's estimation, 'If Monet's really Debussy, and Debussy's really Monet, neither gentleman is worth his salt' (p. 52), for Margaret believes 'What *is* the good of the arts if they're interchangeable?' (p. 52). She concludes her rather one sided conversation with Bast by stating:

> But, of course, the real villain is Wagner. He has done more than any man in the nineteenth century towards the muddling of the arts. I do feel that music is in a very serious state just now, though extraordinarily interesting. Every now and then … there do come these terrible geniuses, like Wagner, who stir up all the wells of thought at once. For a moment it's splendid … But afterwards – such a lot of mud (p. 52).

The conversation is of course very revealing. Not only does it place emphasis on the importance of the critical debate concerning the combination of the arts, but in attributing blame to Wagner it provides a specific reference to the man responsible for *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory. Yet Margaret's understanding is surely limited, for while she might feel that Wagner's and Helen's ideas create muddle and stir up the mud, her more radical sister clearly embraces the concept of combining the arts which, as we have seen, was so important for

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[1] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed*, p. 91.

the Modernist. The sisters have 'great arguments over it' (p. 52), and Forster has highlighted here an issue which was to be debated for many years to come and which is at the centre of Woolf's aesthetic struggle.

At the end of her career, Woolf felt that a true combining of the arts still remained the 'artwork of the future', and yet it is possible to see that Woolf had, in her own work, made very powerful attempts to produce such an artwork and to examine the thought behind the *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories. Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* are, as we have seen, ones essentially founded on combination. They are based on forging connections between different art forms to create the ultimate unified artwork. This is what led Nietzsche, at least initially, to believe that in Wagner's operas he had found the nineteenth-century equivalent of Greek tragedy which he considered to be the ultimate art form. For Nietzsche, in Wagner's work the forces of Apollo and Dionysus had been united and ultimate expression was achieved. This thesis has sought to show that Wagner's ideas, radical and inspirational as they were for his contemporaries, had in fact a wide and revolutionary effect on Modern culture. It was this effect that impinged so powerfully on Woolf's thinking and which can be identified in the evolution of her aesthetic theory. Arguably Woolf's novels do present us with explorations of the many issues that grew out of Modernism's assimilation and adaptation of nineteenth-century aesthetic ideas in which Wagner's theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk* played a major role.

Yet as I have acknowledged, the Modern movement was a complex of radical movements advocating extreme change in many ways. Its flirtation with *Gesamtkunstwerk* was, as I have shown, not about accepting existing theory, it was about the development and transformation of such ideas so that they suited the Modern purpose. Woolf's novels demonstrate this in their careful attention to aesthetic theory in *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*,

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[2] E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 51.

while later novels as I have indicated deal more comprehensively with the ideas of combination, responding to various developments of theories evolving from Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk.* Woolf's aesthetic theories, like those of other Modernists, are ones that are very much based on the concept of aesthetic change. For her, such change is linked to the need to reform the novel and make it a more powerful means of communication: *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories arguably provided one field of inquiry for her in this quest.

Wagner had seen the opera as what Eksteins calls 'a higher form of drama and a further evolution of the Greek synthesis of music and word'.[3] It was, of course, the desire for unity that was so attractive to Modern practitioners, such as Diaghilev, who experienced a similar desire to achieve the total artwork. In the opening section of this thesis I outlined the considerable impact that Wagnerian thinking had on subsequent art movements. It is an impact which should not, I think, be underestimated, for the quest for aesthetic unity became an even more desperate search in the Modern world, a world where social unity was so obviously and catastrophically shattered by World War I. Modernism was itself a disparate and disunited movement where factions fought for supremacy, and yet they were running in parallel in their aims to provide the ultimate form of expression and they were of the same mind in acknowledging that this could most readily be achieved if one art form learned from another.

For Woolf, as we have seen, the question of combination was part of a career long struggle to reform the novel. She recognised the importance of the theories of other arts for informing the novelist and knew that the novel could gain by learning from their practices. The merging of the arts detected in her early realisation of the important place of the musician in 'Street Music' of 1905, and in her comments on *Parsifal* ('we wander with *Parsifal* in our heads

... and sound melts into colour, and colour calls out for words'),[4] which suggest very early on that the arts of painting, music and literature are indebted to one another, is always evident. The importance of the question of combination is evident in her reviews of other people's work. For example, in 1918 Woolf, reviewing Viola Meynell's novel, *Second Marriage*, states: 'She does not experiment with phrases that recur like the motive in a Wagner opera'.[5] Her theoretical essays often look at ways in which the novel could be developed. There is the sense of impotence which can be noted in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924) in the statement, 'we must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments',[6] and the acknowledgement of the novel's providing 'ill-fitting vestments'[7] for the description of life in 'Modern Fiction' (1925). Yet there is also the sense of possibility, for in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', Woolf ends on an optimistic note: 'we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature'.[8] It is, however, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', written in 1927, the year of the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, that provides the most interesting comments on the art of novel writing, and this specifically focuses on the importance of combining the arts. It is here that Woolf looks back to the Elizabethans and to poetic drama, which she identifies as the form that 'lends the whole harmony and force'.[9] She also sets down her vision here for the future of the novel, stating:

> And it is possible that there will be among the so-called novels one which we shall scarcely know how to christen. It will be written in prose, but in a prose which has many characteristics of poetry ... It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted ... What is of importance is that this book which we have seen on the horizon may serve to

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[3] Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, p. 24.
[4] Virginia Woolf, 'Impressions at Bayreuth' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, p. 292.
[5] Virginia Woolf, 'Second Marriage' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, p. 238.
[6] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed*, p. 110.
[7] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in *Collected Essays*, p. 105
[8] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed*, p. 111.
[9] Virginia Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' in *Collected Essays*, p. 219.

> express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them.[10]

She would conclude the essay talking about the writer of the book of the future, which she terms 'this exacting book':

> And then, though this is scarcely visible, so far distant it lies on the rim of the horizon – one can imagine that he [the writer] will have extended the scope of his interest so as to dramatize some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist – the power of music, the stimulus of sight, the effect on us of the shape of trees or the play of colour, the emotions bred in us by crowds, the obscure terrors and hatreds which come so irrationally in certain places or from certain people, the delight of movement, the intoxication of wine[11]

I think these two passages are important, for it is arguably in these comments that we find mention of all the aesthetic fields that Woolf is looking at in her fiction. We have drama, music, image, colour, people, movement and 'the intoxication of wine' which hints at Dionysus. It is evident that Woolf, talking about the 'exacting book' of the future, in 1927 knew the ingredients that were required. She had by this time experimented with many of them. A very short time before she embarked upon the writing of *The Waves*, arguably her most radical flirtation with *Gesamtkunstwerk* theories, Woolf here acknowledged that she knew the answer to the novelist's problem. It is an answer that involved the very diverse forms of combination seen in this novel and in *The Years*. *Between the Acts* may seem to suggest Woolf's sense of the failure of the longed for goal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, yet as I have argued, it is possible to

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[10] Virginia Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' in *Collected Essays*, p. 224.
[11] Virginia Woolf, 'The Narrow Bridge of Art' in *Collected Essays*, p. 228 – 9.

see in *To the Lighthouse*, in *The Waves*, and in *The Years* precisely the sort of combination that creates a version of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the 'artwork of the future'. Woolf may not have in her opinion perfected the method, but she had certainly experimented with techniques that closed the gap between the novel and other art forms just as Diaghilev had with his work at the *Ballets Russes*. Woolf has risen to the challenge of the personified art of fiction mentioned in 'Modern Fiction', she has accepted the art of fiction's challenge to 'break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her', and indeed, 'her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured'. [12]

[12] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in *Collected Essays*, Volume 2, p. 110.

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